

JOHN

RECIPIENT OF: BONE ALLOGRAFT



FIRE CHIEF BACK IN ACTION AFTER SPINAL SURGERY

Taking it easy wasn't an option for John, a 28-year veteran of the Havana, Illinois fire department. He started as a volunteer firefighter, became full-time seven years later and worked his way up through the ranks to fire chief.



John and his son at a practice burn

Being active was a huge part of John's life at work and at home. As a hands-on fire chief, he refused to sit behind a desk. In his free time, he loved to exercise and remodel his 130-year-old home.

A nagging back injury escalated into a painful bulging disc that affected every aspect of John's life. His doctor told him the disc was pressing on his sciatic nerve, but they wanted to explore all options before resorting to spine surgery.

After a year and a half of steroid injections and intense physical therapy, John's pain remained unchanged. His two-block walk to work became a challenge and he hated having to get a ride to the station on a beautiful summer day.

"The pain became a part of me," he said. "It changed my personality to the point where I was moody and couldn't do normal

everyday things. I began to give up on ever having a pain-free life."

John and his doctor decided to move forward with spinal fusion surgery. His doctor used a bone graft comprised of a demineralized donor bone formed into putty to assist with the fusion process.

"I can tell you that I went to sleep with a backache and woke up without any pain," said John. "I sat up and there was no pain and I walked and there was no pain."

After the invasive spine surgery, John faced a long and difficult recovery. For a man who thrives on pushing himself, two weeks of bedrest proved to be a whole new kind of challenge. However, John heeded the advice of his doctor and physical therapist and soon he was able to work out and was cleared to return to work full-time.

John also worked with a personal trainer to rebuild his strength, and the experience opened him up to new possibilities in his life. He is considering becoming a certified trainer so his experience and knowledge can help his fellow firefighters.

"It's all because of this back injury," he said. "The surgery and my recovery changed everything for me. I learned so much from my recovery process and I would love to pursue a training certification."

John is grateful for the generous donation that helped him get his life back. He would love to someday meet his donor's family so he could express what a difference their decision to donate made in his life.