

RECOVERING AND GOING BACK TO WORK



Backyard Soccer Led to a Serious Hand Injury for Sussex County Construction Worker

Michael Clobes lives life to the extreme. As a construction worker, he is not afraid of hard work or getting dirty. In his free time, Clobes is just as busy, often choosing high-impact activities.

So, he didn't take it too seriously when he hurt a finger playing backyard soccer.

"I was playing goalie with my 12-year-old nephew and the ball just hit my pinky finger at an odd angle," Clobes recalls. "I thought I could pop it back in, tape it up, and it would be fine in a couple of days."

Clobes was still having trouble with his right hand and finger a few days later. His wife Allison took him to Beebe Walk-In Care at the Beebe Healthcare–Georgetown location. While Clobes wasn't in much pain, the doctor recommended an X-ray.

Clobes got the X-ray the next day at the Beebe Health Campus in Millville before heading to work at a construction site.

The results were sent to Beebe hand specialist and Board Certified Surgeon Scott Schulze, MD, in Lewes.

A SERIOUS INJURY REQUIRES SURGERY

"I wasn't having any pain, so I just kept the finger taped up and was working as normal," Clobes says. "When I saw Dr. Schulze, he told me it was a spiral fracture and I needed surgery."

Clobes couldn't believe it, though his hand was still wrapped up and not working too well.

"Dr. Schulze told me I would be out of work for a minimum of six to eight weeks, but I fig-

Michael Clobes enjoys intense activities like dirt biking, so he was surprised when an injured finger required surgery and occupational therapy.

Scott Schulze, MD, a Board Certified surgeon who is fellowship trained in Hand and Neurovascular Surgery, uses a neurosurgical microscope during hand surgery.



ured I would heal faster and be back quickly," he says. "While I was talking to him about the recovery and the therapy, it started to sound serious."

This was the first major surgery for Clobes, but he felt confident in Dr. Schulze and the team at the Bookhammer Outpatient Surgery Center at the Beebe Health Campus in Rehoboth Beach.

After surgery, Clobes went to Beebe Rehab Services at the Georgetown location, close to his home, to have a splint custom fabricated and to begin rehabilitation.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Joyce Kuterbach, OT/L, an occupational therapist and hand therapy specialist, worked with Clobes to make a splint that would immobilize his ring and small fingers in a protective position, while allowing him some use of his thumb and first two fingers.

"He was a tough patient because he is so active in his life," Kuterbach says. "I think I made him three or four splints because he would come in and they would be so dirty that we couldn't clean them."

Clobes laughs at how naïve he was about his recovery.

"The first day home, I went into the yard to pick up sticks and my wife started yelling at me," he recalls. "It was the worst feeling not to

be able to do anything. I had a hard time even picking up sticks because I am right-handed and it was difficult to use my left hand."

SURGEON DIRECTS RECOVERY PLAN

Dr. Schulze gave the direction for the recovery plan and Kuterbach followed up by addressing the wound healing and scarring, sensory awareness, pain, motion, and strength. The doctor-occupational therapist team was able to advance Clobes from little movement to improved movement and strength training using resistance bands. Clobes went from not being able to bend his pinky to nearly making a full fist.

Treatments have included hands-on manual therapy, scar and edema massage, exercises, and the provision of a home program and patient education. Customized splint fabrication started at the first session and continues: "A good occupational therapist would never splint once; splints have to be re-checked, tweaked, or re-fabricated to adjust to changes in swelling or movement patterns," says Kuterbach.

Kuterbach says she knew recovery for Clobes would take time. After 10 weeks, she

believes he is bending his hand at 80 percent of normal.

Kuterbach has worked as an occupational therapist since 1985. For the last 15 years she has worked as a hand specialist directly with a Board Certified hand surgeon.

"I am so happy with his recovery," Kuterbach says. "He is such a good patient, and he has made huge improvements. It is really a team effort. When the surgeon, the therapist, and the patient communicate and work together, this is the kind of success you can look forward to."

"I want to be 100 percent," Clobes says. "Joyce is helping me realize that it's happening in steps and I am learning. Following directions has been hard for me, but I'm learning to listen." ■

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—Joyce Kuterbach, OT/L



Michael Clobes works with Beebe Rehab Services occupational therapist Joyce Kuterbach, OT/L, who specializes in hand therapy.