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A COMMUNITY AT CANON RIDGE, A CHANCE TO HONOR THE HUMANITARIAN LEGACY OF THE TITANS

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by stephanie breijo

Remember the high school football team that overcame racism amid the blare of civil-rights riots and stadiums of cheering fans?

Remember the players' sweat drenching the grass beneath them during intensive training to win the state championship?

Remember the tragedy of Gerry Bertier, Virginia's first high school All-American football player, who in an instant was left unable to ever walk again?

For many, remembering the Titans and their defensive leader's car accident is easy after watching the Disney adaptation of their story.

But the years left untouched by the film "Remember the Titans" are just as remarkable, with Bertier winning gold medals in the Wheelchair Olympics, ensuring handicapped access throughout Alexandria--and helping those recently paralyzed and with depression until his death in 1981.

Now carrying Gerry's torch, via 9-irons and some light competition, is the third annual Gerry Bertier No. 42 Foundation golf tournament next weekend--with all proceeds donated to spinal cord injury (SCI) research and rehabilitation.

With a goal of raising \$100,000, the tournament at Cannon Ridge Golf Course will offer prizes and a silent auction--while the events surrounding the tournament include a telethon on the Mike Church Show, three banquets, one V.I.P. reception, meet-and-greets with the original Titans and the actors who played them--and of course, a showing of "Remember the Titans" on the big screen.

The extensive guest list includes actors such as Earl Poitier II and Jay Thomas, Titan coaches Bill Yoast and Herman Boone, original Titans



'Remember the Titans' was a true story with uplifting life lessons--and many of the real Titans will be in town next week.



such as Daryl "Blue" Stanton and Julius Campbell, and other athletes including Howard Richards, George Coghill and Redskins legend Mark Moseley.

A CHARITY GROWS

It's hard to believe that the foundation, which now has more than 60 volunteers, began just a few years ago with only four family members, unsure of where to begin.

It all started with an e-mail in 2005, when Bertier's half sister, Becky Britt, decided to raise awareness of SCI and continue Gerry's own efforts in helping those with physical disabilities.

"It was more or less a memorial to keep things going when he couldn't," Britt said. "There are only about seven or eight SCI foundations in the world, but I would say they're much better paid and staffed--this all comes straight from the heart."

Funds go directly to VCU's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Center, toward anything that assists research and technology or the equipment for both research and clinical care.

The need for such work is easy to see--the Spinal Cord Injury Information network estimates approximately 12,000 new SCI cases each year, with motor vehicle crashes like Bertier's accounting for more than 42 percent.

Though paralysis is permanent in most cases, treatment and physical therapy can aid in the level of wheelchair need for the rest of a patient's life.

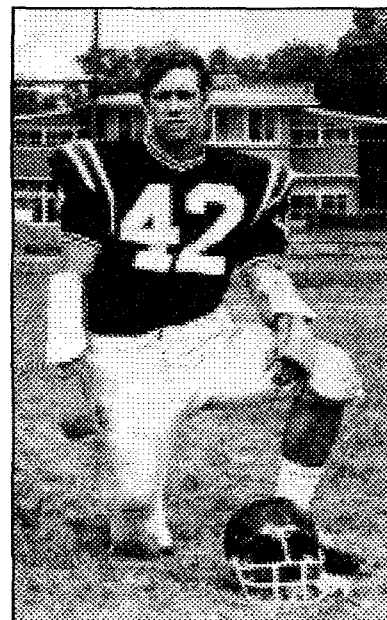
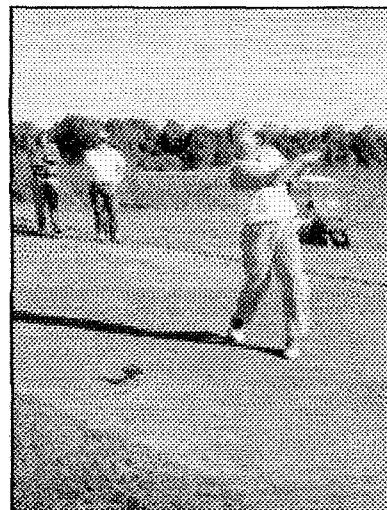
"VCU roughly treats 75 to 100 spinal cord injuries a year," said Dr. William McKinley, the program's director. "This is just the third year of our partnership with the foundation, but their funds have already helped procure some necessary research tools down here. We're just ecstatic to be the beneficiaries of their kindness."

gerry bertier's example

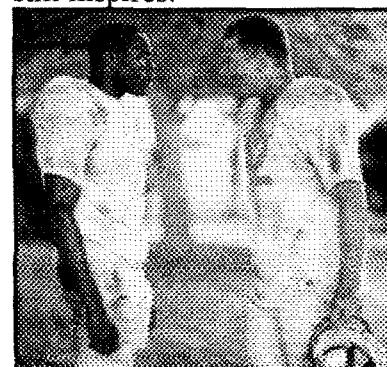
Kerry Lundin, an original Titan who lived with Bertier for four months after the accident, calls Gerry the perfect figure to instill hope.

"He led by example and was always there to help, but he was a vicious competitor," Lundin said with a laugh. "He was quite an inspiration. Not once did he complain about what had happened to him; it was always about the future and what was coming up."

Bertier's competitive spirit lives on, not only in the foundation but in patients, some of whom possess Gerry's own determination.



Gerry Bertier was a football player with heart. His example still inspires.



In April 2007, now-23-year-old Michael Murphy fell from a roof in Northern Virginia, leaving him a quadriplegic. Like Bertier, Murphy was a strong and dedicated football player, well-liked both on and off the field.

Wood Harris as Julius Campbell and Ryan Hurst as Gerry Bertier in a scene from 'Remember the Titans.'

In an instant, his days of playing for Randolph-Macon College were over.

"Here is Michael, this tremendous athlete with a positive outlook and great disposition, and all of a sudden he won't ever move again," said Michael's father, Frank Murphy.

But thanks to the Medical College of Virginia's equipment--much made possible by the foundation--Michael broke all protocol records. He went on to outpatient rehab earlier than expected, then went back to Randolph-Macon, finished his senior year and graduated last May.

With motivation and enthusiasm that Bertier would find all too familiar, Michael is training for the Marine Corps' Oct. 26 marathon and applying to graduate schools, planning to start his higher education in January.

"All this was made possible by the care and the efforts of the Medical College of Virginia and the Gerry foundation," said Frank Murphy. "The help that they have given was in large part what made his recovery possible. I hope it prospers and grows and raises more money to provide the foundation with more to help people like my son."

And so hope the Titans.

This year's tournament has already garnered the support of local corporations such as the Fredericksburg office of Merrill Lynch, The Anderson Co. and The Free Lance-Star, and the foundation believes that recognition for both the organization and the cause can only expand from here.

With the original team members giving awareness speeches from New York to Florida, and planning for next year's star-graced tournament, the field is set for a play to take the foundation and Bertier's ambitions from regional to national.

"It's not going to happen overnight, but it's unbelievable how much it's grown in three years," said Lundin, Bertier's former teammate. "Gerry would be proud. If there's any way we can keep one person out of a wheelchair, it'll all be worth it."

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What: The Gerry Bertier No. 42 Foundation's annual golf tournament When: Many events will support the tournament, including:

Mike Church Show's telethon on Sirius Satellite Radio Channel 144 held from 9 a.m. to noon

"Remember the Titans" film screening Friday, Sept. 26, at 7 p.m.

http://www.fredericksburg.com/News/FLS/2008/092008/09182008/411313/printer_friendly 3/28/2009

V.I.P. reception Friday, Sept. 26, at 9:30 p.m.

Tournament games Saturday, Sept. 27, at 7:30 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Meet-and-greets Saturday, Sept. 27, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: Friday film screening at Southpoint Marquee Cinemas, 5800 Southpoint Centre Blvd., Spotsylvania

Friday V.I.P. reception at Uno Chicago Grille, 10107 Southpoint Parkway, Spotsylvania

Saturday tournament at Cannon Ridge Golf Course, 9000 Celebrate Virginia Parkway, Stafford

What: \$25 for the Friday film showing and V.I.P. reception; \$600 to enter a foursome in the tournament; \$150 to enter a single in the tournament

Free to meet and greet the athletes and actors.

Contact info: For further information, visit gerrybertier.com or contact Buck Sutton at 571/426-7397 or jsutton@theanderco.com. Registration info: To participate in the tournament, register no later than Friday, Sept. 26, by contacting Jennifer Church at 540/548-4566 or jenchurch@verizon.net

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