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Sheriffs deputy faces biggest challenge yet

Paralyzed in surfing accident, he stays positive about rehab

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The Detroit News

Ann Arbor-Oakland County Sheriffs Deputy Rick Cigile has been up for challenges his whole life.

He set swimming records at Riverview High, swam competitively at Wayne State University and spent 23 years as an Oakland County Sheriffs deputy, where he served on motorcycle details for four presidents and won honors for taking drunken drivers off the road.

But now, Cigile, 53, of Canton Township is facing his biggest challenge as he lies in an intensive care unit at the University of Michigan medical center, paralyzed from a bodysurfing accident while on a family vacation last month.

He's looking at months of rehabilitation; he has regained some feeling in his arms and is eager to start working on his upper-body strength, said his wife, Patty Cigile.

"We won't know his prognosis until he really begins rehab," she said. "Right now, he's talking positive but also having trouble eating and he needs to build up his muscles, his strength.... I saw him move his fingers the other day. It was amazing."

On June 21, Rick thought he was going to die. Patty is convinced he did die briefly after being flattened by a 12-foot wave while bodysurfing in the ocean near Destin, Fla., with his sons Ryan, 19, and Jeremy, 17.

"His face was gray ... oh, I know he was gone," Patty said. "But God wasn't through with him."

"Our sons saw him face down in the water and pulled him out. An anesthesiologist and nurse who were nearby and lifeguard all took turns giving him CPR."

Rick broke two vertebrae, dislocated a shoulder and suffered kidney and liver damage after suddenly being slammed to the ocean floor by the wave. He was helpless, unable to move his arms or legs.

"He felt something snap in his neck and saw a bright light," Patty said.

"He couldn't move. All he could think was to hold his breath as long as he could."

The family wanted to bring him home and take him to the Ann Arbor hospital. Rick's insurer described it as "lateral treatment" and declined to pay the \$16,000 bill to fly him home, so Patty said she scraped together what she could.

"I couldn't commute to Florida," Patty said. "I went to savings and borrowed some from this credit card and that credit card. We will try to sort it out later."

The Cigiles' Canton Township home will be redesigned to accommodate Rick's needs. A neighbor and

others are building a ramp and widening doorways for when Rick is released.

A first-floor room and shower also will need to be added, Patty said.

Sgt. Mark Venus, Rick's supervising officer for three years at Oakland County Sheriffs Office Lyon Township substation, described him as "a great partner."

"He's a good officer and we really miss him around here," Venus said.

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