

Quick work saves farmer in baling accident

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/091213/mattSM.png>

Family members rescue Belgium man expected to survive life-threatening injuries

Town of Belgium farmer Matt Winker, 32, survived a Sept. 5 farm accident so horrific that those who saw his severely injured body doubted he would live.

Matt, who lives at 6395 Six Mile Rd. with his wife Sarah and daughters Maggie, 6, and Mikayla, 13, was helping his uncle Joe Ott with field work.

He was baling hay on Ott's farm at 5505 Six Mile Rd. The baler makes 4-by-8-foot bales that weigh 1,000 pounds each.



Matt and Ott stopped to switch tractors shortly after 4 p.m., Matt's father Tom Winker said. When Matt got off his tractor, he saw wire on the baler spool and reached in with his right arm to pull it out.

At the same time, the hydraulic arm of the baler locked into the next bale and hit Winker's arm.

"It hooked and grabbed his left shoulder, rotated 180 degrees and pulled Matt into the machine," Winker said.

"When it completed the cycle, it locked back into place and Matt's body fell to the ground."

The process took less than a minute, Winker said, adding quick action by Ott and his wife Claire saved his son's life.

Ott immediately called and motioned to his wife who was nearby. She applied pressure to the gaping wound on Matt's back to try to slow the blood loss while her husband called 911.

Mark Theisen, an emergency medical technician with the Belgium Fire Department who lives next door to Ott, arrived first.

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“He took one look at Matt and said, ‘We have to get Flight for Life,’” Winker said. “He called for the flight and for the Port Washington paramedic unit, which did a remarkable job.

“Those few things really, truly saved Matt’s life. After seeing how he got pinned and pulled into that baler, there was some divine intervention. He was not in there alone.”

The Flight for Life landed in the field and a blood transfusion was started. Matt received 30 units of blood that day and another four units the next day, his father said.

Winker said his son’s ribs were torn from his spine, the long muscles along both sides of the spine were torn vertically and there were multiple rib fractures. Titanium rods were inserted into his son’s back that night to stabilize it. Two puncture wounds in his left lung were also repaired.

“We saw him at midnight and he looked pretty good considering what he had been through,” Winker said.

“The threat of infection is so great in farm accidents. That’s the real concern. He is getting antibiotics. We’re taking it one day at a time.”

Matt’s upper left arm was broken in several places and is in a cast.

His shoulder blades were also broken, but the orthopedic surgeon believes the bones will repair without surgery, Winker said.

Matt, who is in an induced coma, was scheduled for surgery Wednesday, Sept. 11, to patch the wound on his back that is as big as two palms held one above the other, Winker said.

“They wanted to wait a couple days to make sure the skin is viable to suture,” he said.

Matt will need plastic surgery on his back, his father said. Surgeons have already looked at the wound and are confident that can be done, he said.

“Obviously, it will be a long recovery for him,” Winker said.

“I know my son. He will do whatever he has to do to get back into shape and back to farming. We’ve had tremendous support from not only the neighbors, but throughout the state, offering to help on the farm.”

Matt, who bought his parents’ farm, works 700 acres and has 160 milking cows, his father said.

His son has two employees who do much of the milking and other farm work and neighbors are filling in, Winker said.

The Otts have been helping on weekdays and several farmers have offered to help with harvesting and silage, he said.

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Winker, his wife Holly and son Tim, who have full-time jobs off the farm, help on weekends.

Winker noted farming ranks alongside the mining industry as one of the most dangerous occupations.

“It truly was an accident,” Winker said. “I teach tractor safety in the county, and all three of my kids went through the tractor course.

“But Matt was in a hurry and didn’t think when he reached into the baler. He knows better.”

Image Information: A SMILING Matt Winker, holding his youngest daughter Maggie, who was 4 at the time, showed off his abundant corn crop for the Aug. 18, 2011, cover of Ozaukee Press. Winker is recovering at Froedtert Memorial Hospital in Wauwatosa from a horrific farm accident on Sept. 5. Ozaukee Press file photo