

Script – Print - A Story of Courage and Compassionate Care

OSF Health Care Rockford Regional Burn Unit Saves Dreams as well as Lives

His adult life was just getting started. Still, it was his wiser-than-his-age quick thinking and determination that helped save Michael Kester's life.

The Sterling, Illinois man was only 20-years old in December 2017 when, while laying drain tile in farm field, he accidentally struck a gas pipeline.

There was a massive explosion that, ultimately, killed two of Kester's co-workers. He avoided the direct blast and flames, but the heat was intense enough to catch his clothes on fire.

"I ran until I - I guess I realized I was on fire and dove to the ground, rolled myself out," says burn victim Michael Kester. "It was still too hot and so I kept running and finally got to cooler air."

Kester was quickly flown to Rockford and OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center's Level I Trauma Center and its Regional Burn Unit. Suffering burns over 85-percent of his body, the burn unit team immediately got to work saving Kester's life.

"He had a spirit about him." says Tracey Kennington, a neuro/trauma burn nurse at OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center. "And no matter what we were doing as far as treatment goes, he, he did it. And he never complained. He didn't resist. He just did it. As soon as he was done with all of his grafting surgeries, he just catapulted into, you know, his true recovery - his healing process."

After being stabilized and to help with his healing process and pain management, Kester was kept in a coma for nearly two months.

Once awake, Kester was more than anxious to get started on getting his life back on track.

"I just think he's a strong, phenomenal young man who had a strong will to survive," says Dr. Stathis Poulakidas, Medical Director of the Regional Burn Unit at OSF Saint Anthony HealthCare Medical Center. "Did survive and is thriving at this point and time, like he was never burned. And that's exactly what we want when we begin our process, through resuscitation and going through the surgeries. All the painstaking hours at the bedside. We want them to get back to as much of normalcy so that we don't even realize they have a burn."

More than two years after the accident, Kester is back to work in the farm fields. He attributes the burn unit team, nurses and Dr. Poulakidas for saving his life - which he admits - now provides him a new perspective and appreciation.

To see the entire video of Michael's story, visit <https://www.osfhealthcarefoundation.org/osf-healthcare-saint-anthony-medical-center/>