

HeadNorth

Eric Northbrook had it all: a flourishing career in real estate, a beautiful wife and kids, an active lifestyle. In a split second, it almost came to a tragic end. Two years ago this January, Northbrook was thrown from his motorcycle. He survived, but a severed spinal cord left him paralyzed from the chest down.

Now in a wheelchair, Northbrook still has it all. He was back to conducting business meetings a few hours after his surgery. His family and friends have rallied around him with unconditional love and support. He regularly goes fly-fishing, golfing, and skiing. Northbrook decided that despite the many adjustments he'd have to make, his injury would not determine the rest of his life.

This is an attitude that Northbrook wants to instill in other San Diego victims of spinal cord injuries. In the months following his accident, he and his family formed the HeadNorth Foundation, which provides two forms of financial assistance. During the immediate aftermath of an injury, HeadNorth offers a \$1,000 cash grant, which can be used to cover airfare and lodging for family members or whatever else is needed. For the longer-term transition to recovery, HeadNorth funds wheelchairs, ramp construction, converted vans, and so on — costs that quickly spiral up beyond what many families can afford.

Perhaps most importantly, HeadNorth provides reassurance and hope to people whose lives have changed quite drastically.

"We want them to know that their life isn't over because they're paralyzed," Northbrook says. "You can still have a very wonderful life. One of the most meaningful things to me when I was first hurt in the hospital in La Jolla was when a gentleman in a chair came into my room and showed me photos of him deep sea fishing. That changed my outlook immediately." (858/350-3193, www.headnorth.org)

— Anna Maria Stephens,
photo by Vincent Kusakal

Eric Northbrook