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MEDIA RELEASE

BRENDON RETURNS TO THE CFA AFTER LIFE-SAVING RESCUE

In early 2016 Brendon Vlug was in a coma with fears he may never wake again.

A horrific car crash in Narre Warren had left him with a suspected brain injury, a fractured skull, fractured vertebrae, two pelvic fractures, a scapular break, bruised lungs, and damage to his neck.

Ironically a Hallam CFA Brigade officer was the regional duty officer that night as the neighbouring Narre Warren North Brigade cut Brendon from the wreck.

Brendon had joined the Hallam Brigade as a 12-year-old and had been active for the previous four years. The rescue became a daunting personal challenge for brigade members after they recognised his fire gear, but they were able to cut him free and he was flown in critical condition to the Alfred Hospital.'

At the hospital Brendon's parents, Dennis and Jenny, were told his head trauma was a life and death concern.

However, Brendon, 21, defied the odds after a five-hour operation to remove the front of his skull to ease swelling around his brain. Within five days he was talking and after 11 days he was released from intensive care. Ten days later he moved to Caulfield Hospital to start rehabilitation.

As Brendon made his full recovery, one of his priorities was to return as a volunteer with the Hallam CFA Brigade, which had been part of his life for as long as he can remember.

He has now resumed his training and duties alongside the volunteers who helped to save his life.

"Everything's fine now – I'm back to where I was before the accident," Brendon said.

He had been attending CFA training during his rehabilitation but it wasn't until the end of the year that he was able to resume full duties as a volunteer fireman.

“I needed to do an assessment because I’d been off for more than six months, just to make sure I was still able to do it,” he said.

Brendon passed with flying colours and has become active again in the Hallam brigade, joining paid firefighters and about 30 volunteers who respond to about 2000 calls a year.

“It’s good to be back at it. It’s what I grew up around because Dad has been an active member before I was born.”

Brendon has no memory of the accident, although his fellow CFA volunteers can fill in some of the details. “I have to rely on their stories,” he jokes.

Brendon said his accident had given him an even greater appreciation of the work of CFA volunteers.

Now working as an apprentice chef, Brendon doesn’t rule out future a career in the CFA.

“It’s something I’ll look at when I’m old enough to qualify.”

Hallam CFA Brigade volunteer First Lieutenant Lee Austin said it was great to have Brendon back. “He’s a good lad and was really keen to get back into it,” Mr Austin said.

“We’ve got the busiest pumper in the state and we’re the third busiest brigade in the state,” he said.

Hallam is one of 35 integrated CFA brigades in Victoria with paid staff and volunteers providing professional fire services to householders, commercial premises, industry, and significant infrastructure.

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