

JCL's Miracles: Level I Trauma Center Provides Second Chance at Life

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Jon Babcock was driving to work three years ago when a “strong, silent safety net called a trauma center saved my life.”



Jon and Heather Babcock with Hayden (left) and Jon Jr. on the helipad at John C. Lincoln North Mountain Hospital's Level I Trauma Center.

"Before that day, I didn't know that trauma centers existed," said the Phoenix native who is now the father of two young boys. "I'm alive today because of the Level I Trauma Center at John C. Lincoln North Mountain Hospital," he said.

The day he was rescued by that safety net started out like any work day for Jon and Heather Babcock. Heather Babcock drove to her job at a motor vehicle inspection station. She was seven months pregnant and she and her husband were busy making preparations for the arrival of their first son. Babcock climbed onto his motorcycle, fastened his helmet and rode toward his job as an air conditioning technician. The warm spring weather meant he would have a busy day.

At the intersection of Cave Creek Road and 48th Street, a mile away from his home, the unexpected happened. Babcock collided with a 6,000-pound pickup truck.

"I went flying head first over the low windshield of my bike and landed on the hood of the truck. I lay there for a split second then slid off. The impact knocked the breath out of me, but I thought that if I could just stand up, I could walk it off and be fine," the now 36-year-old Phoenix native remembered.

Another motorist stopped to render aid and called 911. "I'll always be grateful to him – whoever he is. He put his hands on my shoulders and told me to stay calm, taking charge in a kind, but firm way," said Babcock.

The driver of the pickup truck was uninjured. Paramedics arrived within minutes and evaluated Babcock's injuries. His vital signs were stable and he was fully alert. Both his wrists were fractured and he had an odd inability to speak. The paramedics called for a helicopter to transport him to the nearest level I trauma center, and that was located at John C. Lincoln North Mountain Hospital.

"I remember the helicopter being very loud, and it seemed to take forever to get to the hospital," said Babcock. In reality, the ride took fewer than five minutes. He was met on the helipad of John C. Lincoln North Mountain Hospital by a crew of trauma nurses and physicians who worked quickly to get him into the trauma center for evaluation.

"I felt so tired. I didn't really hurt anywhere except my wrists, but I felt incredibly, incredibly tired," he said. "Because I couldn't speak, I communicated with eye blinking, and the whole team kept working with me to keep me calm and focused."

Within minutes, a CT scan revealed that Babcock had a life-threatening injury – his aorta was torn and he was bleeding into his chest. He needed immediate surgery to repair the damage to "big red," as the aorta is known because of its size and the fact that it carries all the body's oxygenated blood away from the heart.

In a level I trauma center such as John C. Lincoln North Mountain's, a fully staffed operating room is available around the clock, ready for emergencies. A team of experienced trauma professionals – surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurses, radiologists and others are ready to do their jobs in providing level I trauma care for a patient with critical injuries. Services also are provided by those who staff a blood bank, laboratory and diagnostic imaging. All components of that "strong, silent safety net" Babcock referred to were firmly in place when he needed them.

Babcock's father and wife, in the meantime, had gotten word of the crash and Babcock's whereabouts and headed to John C. Lincoln North Mountain Hospital. When his mom, a nurse at another hospital in the Valley, heard that his aorta was torn, she knew that the next few hours would be critical to his survival.

"Life seemed to be suspended that day, while he was in surgery and in the time just afterward. To know how critically injured he was, and to see how well he is doing today is just remarkable," said Heather Babcock.

Three days later, he was up and walking the halls of John C., the hospital where he had been born 33 years earlier. Six days after the wreck, he got to go home. Babcock returned to the hospital for several surgeries to repair his wrists and stayed at home for several months to recover and be a full-time dad to Hayden, who was born two months after the wreck.

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The Babcock family with Rhonda Beckstrom, RN, BSN, CEN, trauma clinical coordinator

The Babcocks look back on that time and think about what they learned that day. The “strong, silent safety net” that saved Babcock not only gave Hayden a dad, but gave Jon Jr. a chance to be part of the family. The baby was born two years after the wreck that could have so easily taken his dad's life.

“I think about it often, how I got a second chance at life, thanks to so many people – the man who stopped to help at the scene, the police and paramedics, the helicopter pilot and flight nurse, all the many professionals on the trauma team at John C., then all the many people who helped me recover. My family, my colleagues, my church, my neighbors – they were all there for us,” said Babcock.

“I'll always, always be grateful to those who plan for the unexpected, and for those who are there, ready to help, when people like me need them.”

For more information about John C. Lincoln's Level I Trauma Center, visit JCL.com/trauma.