

# breaking ground

Issue 95

2018/2019  
ANNUAL  
ARTS ISSUE



# UNMASKING BRAIN INJURY



Terry M.



Melanie S.



Susan E.



Lena S.



Lee



Zach B.



Connor R.



Orlando Manghana



Jerome R.



Tina



Christa M.

Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) occur in a matter of seconds and can change a person's life in an instant. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates 2.5 million Americans each year sustain a TBI. Of that number, 52,000 die from their injury. It is estimated another 3.5 million individuals after injury require long-term care in the United States. TBI is referred to as a "silent epidemic" because often problems caused from TBI are not as visible as some disabilities. The general public typically does not understand or have awareness of the consequences of a TBI.

In January of 2018, the Chattanooga Area Brain Injury Association, also known as CABIA, embraced a project started by Mary Foll, Executive Director of Hinds' Feet Farms in Asheville, NC, called "Unmasking Brain Injury." Participants who attend CABIA's monthly support groups in Chattanooga and Cleveland, TN, eagerly engaged in this opportunity. Foll wanted "to show others that be heard and "to show others that persons living with disability due to their brain injury are like everyone else. They deserve dignity, respect, compassion and the opportunity to prove their worth." He created a separate non-profit just for this project called Unmasking Brain Injury.

The mission of Unmasking Brain Injury is to promote awareness of the prevalence of brain injury; to give survivors a voice and



Putting it all together.

This project turned out to be an amazing therapeutic and inspiring activity for these two groups. Once they grasped what this project entailed, participants felt that their story was important, that it needed to be heard, and that it might help others learn just a little more of what they go through on a day-to-day basis. The creativity and expression of emotions filled the room as the survivors engaged in multiple hours to complete "their story". Drew shared, "I had recently received

my degree in chemistry from Southern University in 2015 and was looking forward to furthering my education and getting married to my best friend Emily. My life changed instantly when I was found unconscious in a ditch from a bling accident. I was in critical condition and diagnosed with a severe traumatic brain



injury. I went through extensive rehabilitation both in inpatient and outpatient facilities to get to where I am today. The blue helmet on my mask symbolizes the long ride back on a new path.

Amberle wrote, "My injury was caused by physical abuse on multiple occasions. I would not wish a brain injury on anyone. People do not understand what it is like to walk in these shoes. They can't see the problems that are hidden on the inside. The purple on my mask represents my favorite color. It

gives me HOPE. The black on my mask shows the pain and darkness around me. I keep going because God is my strength and helps me keep going. Never give up!"

In 1994, Carolyn was in a horrible automobile accident and sustained a severe TBI. She expressed, "When I woke from a coma, I had 10 years missing from my memory. I was married at the time and did not even remember anything about my husband or that marriage, as it was a part of the 10 years erased from my mind. I went home from the hospital and rehab with a complete stranger." My process to learn information changed but not my ability to do it. The frustrating part of my injury is the information is there, I temporarily can't always access it when I need it."

She describes the tags sticking out of her mask as a representation of her memory loss. She adds, "These are explosions of my memories that I lost as thoughts escape my brain." She wants others to know, "Put My Best Face Forward displays my need to always be put together. I want to present to the world an image of always being the best I can be and do the best I can in all that I try to do."

CABIA is excited that Elitanger Hospital has chosen some of the masks to be on permanent display in their facility. The others will travel around the Chattanooga area to help promote awareness about brain injuries.

From all around the world, masks are created, stories are shared, and the final products are posted on the projects website [www.unmaskingbraininjury.org](http://www.unmaskingbraininjury.org).



John and Jennifer S.



Jenny C.



Terry McNeese



Carolyn K.



Annette M.



Edward "Alex" B.



Kenneth K.



Cornie D.