

# 'You're my idol, buddy'

By JoDee Brooke

This past weekend was a very special one for a young man from Chippewa Falls. Ten-year-old Ty Wiberg received his certification in scuba diving under the instruction of local dive instructor Keith Cormican. That means he can dive anywhere in the world. Last Saturday and Sunday, Ty was excited to be at Lake Wazee completing the skills portion of his certification.

There's a bit more to Ty's story, though. Born with spina bifida, Ty has no sensation in his legs from his knees down. He can only walk with the help of leg braces. He has a stent in his neck that removes cerebral fluid from around his brain. And, he has the ability to inspire anyone who has the privilege to meet him.

Before Ty Wiberg was even born, his dad and mom, Al and Michelle, learned their child would be born with spina bifida. Spina bifida is a birth defect that involves the incomplete development of the spinal cord or its coverings, occurring at the end of the first month of pregnancy. The two sides of the embryo's spine fail to join together, leaving an open area. In some cases, the spinal cord or other membranes may push through this opening in the back.

In Ty's case, his spinal cord was exposed outside of the vertebrae. Surgery has corrected the exposed cord. It didn't bring back feeling

in his legs.

"We were told he would never walk," shared Al. "He has no sensation from the knees down. His quad and hip movement allow him to kick from the hips. He has to be careful he doesn't hurt the bottom of his feet."

"I love the water and I love to go snorkeling," shared Ty. "I really wanted to scuba dive and we can't scuba dive until we're certified."

"Ty loves to read," said Al, "and he comprehends so much. So, I gave him my old dive book. He read the whole book."

See Buddy, page 2



Contributed photo

Ty Wiberg and Keith Cormican meet up down under with a brief "high five." Their meeting left each diver with a unique and deep respect for each other.



JoDee Brooke/Banner Journal

Ten-year-old Ty Wiberg (front, center) of Chippewa Falls was born with a spinal injury. His parents, Al (second from right) and Michelle, were told their son would never be able to walk. This young gentleman proved them wrong, though. He not only walks with the help of braces and an unbelievably strong will, he completed his scuba diving certification this past weekend under the instruction of Keith Cormican (left) and assistance from Dave Whitehouse (far right), rescue diver with the Eau Claire Fire Department.

## Buddy From Front Page

The next step to becoming certified was to train with Cormican. For two days this past week, Ty, along with six other divers, pool trained before putting the skills they'd learned to the test in Lake Wazee before completing their certification.

"Ty is a young man with a lot of spunk and determination," shared Cormican. "It made the last few days for us very inspiring."

"It's all about independence," Al said. "There are kids at these meetings we go to with other families who have a child with spina bifida. There are kids in the same situation Ty was in and they have never walked. They are in wheel chairs. Ty got rid of his walker when he was two years old. We still use a wheelchair when we go places where we're going to be doing a lot of walking. Parents need to give their children independence. It's all about independence."

"And, Keith has been just fantastic. He is specially trained to teach people with disabilities, and he works so hard to adapt diving for those who have disabilities."

Cormican fitted Ty with webbed gloves for his hands to provide more ease when moving through the water. The fins he wears are slit, which also allows for less work when moving in the water.

"I was surprised how strong he is," Cormican said. "I already knew he was doing good underwater, but I was surprised how well he did on the surface. I thought I'd have to help him out swimming. I don't have to. He really is an amazing kid. It was the most gratifying experience I have had in this business."

"We're going to Mexico over spring break," Ty said. "I can't wait to dive and see the coral reefs and fish."

"This is my first time ever doing this," shared dive student Victor Czajka of West Salem. "As a student, Keith keeps everything so relaxed."

"You're my idol, buddy," Czajka said to Ty as the two headed down to the water from Pike's Peak along Lake Wazee, each looking forward to diving into the lake.