

7



Josh



Wanda



Irene

NEVER EVERS CROSS THE FINISH LINE

At the Second Annual Toga Trot, seven participants astonished onlookers as they crossed the finish line. The event, held on Halloween morning at the Dolce Conference Center in Peachtree City, drew a crowd of 5K walkers and runners. Seven of them were Never Evers.

Who are the *Never Evers*? The term was coined by Dr. Susan Leger, Director of Fayetteville's Center for Integrative Manual Therapy (CenterIMT Atlanta) and one of the race sponsors. Leger explains that the *Never Evers* are a "fast-growing group of persons who have been told by medical experts that they would *Never Ever*—and now they can! They are! And they'll continue to!"

Josh Vanderbush

learned about CenterIMT Atlanta's Spinal Cord Injury Recovery Program through last year's *Guide to Fitness & Health* article about the *Never Ever Boys* at the Toga Trot. Josh was in a wheelchair after having sustained a T6 complete spinal cord injury (SCI.) He contacted CenterIMT and promptly began his advanced 8 Component SCI Recovery Program, quickly progressing from Stage 6 (able to transfer, but unable to stand) all the way to Stage 9 (able to take independent steps using a rolling walker).

At the 2009 Toga Trot, Josh successfully walked across the finish line, traveling 10 meters downhill, only using a rolling walker and rigid ankle and foot orthotics (AFO). The cold rain and gusty winds blew the finish line structure over as he approached, just inches in front of him, but Josh would not be kept from his goal. He calmly waited while the structure was righted and then continued on his way.

Wanda Andereck and Irene Belcher

were the first *Never Evers* to cross the finish line this year. Wanda had been forced into a wheelchair 11 years ago with Rheumatoid Arthritis. Through continuing treatment at CenterIMT Atlanta, Wanda, now 70 years old, enjoys a full independent life, free from any assistive device. And Wanda walked the full 5K at this year's Toga Trot in slightly over one hour—pain-free, chatting and smiling the whole time. Irene also suffers from a debilitating disorder and had been limited to her home, but through Dr. Leger's Recovery Program, Irene is now out and about. She walked, independently and effortlessly, for a half mile and crossed the finish line in under 15 minutes.

Trevor Akers

one of the original *Never Ever Boys*, had been diagnosed with a closed head injury (CHI) and complete T2 SCI, and was told he would *Never Ever* get out of his power wheelchair. At the 2008 Toga Trot, he proudly walked 10 meters with the aid of a rolling walker and AFOs. His performance this year was amazing! Using the same equipment, Trevor completed 10 times the distance, walking 100 meters (up and downhill). Next year's goal? The distance won't change, but his equipment will. Trevor plans to complete the distance with canes instead of a walker!



Trevor



Natalie



Kelley




Cindy

Natalie Barnhard and Kelley Goddu

were told they would never leave their power wheelchairs, and

Cindy Donald

diagnosed with a C3 complete SCI, was *Never Ever* supposed to get out of her 'sip and puff' wheelchair, a common aid for extremely high SCIs with breathing limitations. In spite of these bleak predictions, Natalie, with the diagnosis of C5 complete SCI, walked 50 meters in a gait trainer. Kelley, diagnosed with a C4 complete SCI, self propelled her manual wheelchair for a full one-half mile, up and down the hills and in the rain. Cindy has moved fully from her 'sip and puff' to a manual wheelchair with power assist wheels—and that's how she traveled the 50 meters to this year's finish line.

Dr. Leger and everyone at CenterIMT Atlanta congratulate these outstanding athletes! 

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Center of Integrative Manual Therapy and Diagnostics



770-716-8885

500 W Lanier Ave Suite 303

Fayetteville GA 30214

Fax: 770-716-7425

www.CenterIMTAtlanta.com