

Basile Keeps Busy, Keeps Moving

Between five-hour workouts, paralysis victim advocates for stem-cell research.

[By Ken Millstone/The Almanac](#)

April 11, 2006

Josh Basile doesn't waste his time talking about what people with paralysis can't do.

He doesn't have much time to waste anyway.

Last Friday he gave two speeches at Walt Whitman High School before heading to the National Rehabilitation Hospital for an appointment. He also had workouts to do at home — part of a five-hour-per-day regimen. He calls meeting with new paralysis patients through his organization, Determined2Heal, a "full-time job," but he still finds time to work with the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation Action Network and the Student Society for Stem Cell Research.

BASILE, 20, WAS PARALYZED in a body surfing accident at Bethany Beach, Del., on Aug. 1, 2004. The 2003 Bullis graduate and former tennis star was spending a week at the beach with friends before returning to Skidmore College. A single wave pounded him against the wet sand, tearing off his bathing suit and leaving him motionless. Friends thought he was playing a prank on them before they saw his eyes rolled up into his head.

First he had to adjust to life as a quadriplegic.

Then he had to adjust to the idea that in the nascent field of spinal cord injury research, not everything is the way it seems.

"I transitioned from a complete spinal cord injury to incomplete," he said.

"That's not supposed to happen."

Basile has steadily regained movement throughout his body, including movement below the level of his injury, which was considered impossible. Now Basile has taken on yet another role, as a national advocate for stem cell research, spinal cord injury research, and beach safety.

"There's \$27 billion going toward the NIH budget a year and only \$25.5 million is going towards stem cell research," Basile said. "It's 1/1000 of their budget which possibly could cure the majority of all diseases and injuries that affect this country and the rest of the world."

Basile will join more than hundreds of other people in wheelchairs and their families at Working2Walk, a national symposium and rally in Washington, D.C. April 30-May 2.

Attendees will hear from national medical experts and lobby members of congress to support the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Act, which calls for expanding paralysis research and rehabilitative care practices through the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies.

Basile said that the rally is about "learning how to be an advocate."

He's taking two courses at the University of Maryland to the same end.

One is a public speaking course called "Argumentation and Debate" and the other an honors seminar called "Stem Cells: Who Cares? Medical Issues," which deals with controversies in medical research and treatment.

"THE HUMAN BODY IS just so damn smart. Its about us tweaking the system that little amount," Basile said. "Clinical studies are really the key

Beach Safety

Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach, Calif., started

"Project Wipeout" in

1979, following a summer in which it admitted five patients with severe neck and spinal cord injuries.

Run by doctors and nurses, the program teaches young people about the potential dangers that exist at beaches and other open bodies of water, the types of injuries that occur and how to prevent them.

Basile plans to spearhead a similar organization on the East Coast.

"Some of my fondest memories are at the beach.

I love the beach. But there's a safe way to have fun. There's a right way and a wrong way," he said.

"Certain beaches are not safe. Their waves are not to be ridden in, not to be boogie boarded," he said pointing to beach

replenishment programs that take offshore sand to beautify the public beach areas, leaving sharp drop-offs underwater that create fast- and hard-breaking waves.

"When you think of sand you think it's soft. Guess what? When it gets wet, wet sand is like concrete. And the bottom of the swimming pool is

factor when it comes to my life changing."

But as summer closes in, there is one issue that Basile is thinking about even more than that — preventing others from becoming paralyzed at the beach.

"What's going on when you're at the beach is that these waves are picking you up and throwing you head-first into the ocean floor. Every time you ride a wave, that's what it does," Basile said, noting that wet sand is as hard as concrete.

He won't go as far as saying that no one should swim in the ocean, but he is calling for universal signage and an end to cosmetic beach replenishment projects, where sand is collected offshore, creating underwater drop-offs that give rise to fast- and hard-breaking waves. All that doesn't leave much time for just being 20.

"I've been really ... stuck with a lot of adults. I've had to grow up way too quickly," Basile said. "I can't joke around. ... That's kind of tough."

concrete. So you've got to follow the same rules as if you're in the swimming pool. In the swimming pool you can't dive in the water if it's five feet," Basile said.

Additional safety tips from Project Wipeout:

- * Learn to swim. If you can't swim an overhead stroke for at least 15 minutes, you should not be in the ocean.

- * Never swim alone. Always swim with a buddy, and swim near a lifeguard whenever possible.

- * Stay out of the "surf zone" where the waves break at the shoreline. Waves are at their greatest force here, and even a small wave can lift you up and throw you headfirst into the sand.

- * Never dive headfirst into the water from the beach, a surfboard, pier or jetty. Sandbars could lie just beneath the surface.

- * No one can determine the depth of the water by looking at the surface, whether you are standing at the shoreline, on a pier or jetty, or on a surfboard. Always check the depth of the water with your feet, not your head.

- * When boogie boarding or bodysurfing, keep your arms out in front of you to protect your head and neck.

- * When bodysurfing, swim

at an angle to the shore.

* If you get caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current. Then swim at an angle away from the current toward the shore.

* Alcohol and drugs cloud your ability to make wise decisions, and that could be fatal.



Photo by Ken Millstone/The Almanac Basile at a fund-raiser last July for his paralysis education and awareness foundation, Determined2Heal.



Contributed Participants at the 2005 Working 2 Walk rally for paralysis research on the National Mall. This year's rally and symposium is April 28-May 1.

[Printable Version](#) 