FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“FORMER BURKE PATIENT RETURNS AFTER 30 YEARS TO SHARE STORY, HOPE TO CURRENT SPINAL CORD INJURY PATIENTS”

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. – June 5, 2013 – It’s been nearly three decade since Michael Babboni wheeled through the halls of Burke Rehabilitation Hospital but on Friday, June 7, Babboni returns to where the his second life began. Babboni will be touring the nursing unit and the clinic where he spent nine months rehabilitating after his spinal cord injury, along with his wife Roseann and 17-year-old son Matthew.

“I want [Matthew] to see Burke and see what helped shape who I am today,” Babboni said. “I think it’s important for him to understand what happened.”

He will also be sharing his story with current spinal cord injury patients, including Elliot Vasquez, 20, who, like Babboni, injured his spinal cord at a young age.

“I was admitted to Burke two days shy of my 20th birthday,” Babboni recalled, after spending months at Albany Medical Center. Prior to his injury, Babboni was an active 19-year-old from New Rochelle, attending Sienna College for computer science. In the spring of 1984, while playing mud volleyball with his friends at school, he dove for a ball not seeing a hard mass beneath the surface of murky, muddy water. His chest collided with the earth, whipping his head back and snapping his C3 and C4 vertebrae. “Suddenly, everything was still,” he said.

Babboni was rushed to Albany Medical’s trauma center where they re-set his spine and admitted him to the intensive care unit. He spent five weeks in the ICU before he was able to have spinal fusion surgery. During that time, he began to get some movement back—wiggle his toes and eventually bend his knees.

On July 3, 1984, Babboni was admitted to Burke where he would spend the next nine month in intensive inpatient rehabilitation therapy and another nine months as an outpatient.

-MORE-
“Dr. Peter Stern [Babboni’s then doctor] was great,” he said. “He advocated to keep me here until our house was accessible and something I can work with, but more importantly, kept me until I was ready.”

Babboni received intense physical and occupational therapy to strengthen his legs and arms and increase his range of motion. As a computer science student, it was his goal to be able to type on a keyboard and go back to school to finish his degree.

“When you start, it’s great. You have little but constant progress throughout and you start to think you’re stabilizing and are going to get back to where you were,” Babboni explained. “Things keep coming back but then you get to a point where you realize, that’s it. This is as far as I can go.”

While Babboni regained strength to stand and walk short distances with the help of braces and crutches, he was not able to recover motion below his shoulders. “There’s sensation everywhere but I have limited independent motion and truly only with my left little finger. But that’s not what you should focus on,” he added. “And this is what I want to tell all the other spinal cord injury patients. You have to appreciate what you have and focus on that. Focus on what you can do, not on what you can’t. Being at Burke has helped me see that.”

With his undeterred will, Babboni went on to finish his computer science bachelor’s degree at Iona College and his master’s degree at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, using a mouth stick instead of his fingers to type. He currently resides in Delray Beach, Fla., with his wife and son, and drove the nearly 1,300-mile distance from there to White Plains by himself with his new van, equipped with a joystick driving system.

Babboni will be visiting Burke Rehabilitation Hospital from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and speaking with current Burke patients at 10:30 a.m. on June 7. Prior to this special visit, Babboni, through Burke, also spent time speaking to high school students after finishing his rehab, talking to them about spinal cord injuries and answering their questions. To speak with Babboni prior to or during his visit, or for other media inquiries, please contact Richard Sgaglio at (914) 597-2491 or Jorina Fontelera at (914) 597-2877.

-MORE-
About Burke Rehabilitation Hospital

Burke Rehabilitation Hospital is a private, not-for-profit, acute rehabilitation hospital. Founded in 1915, it is the only hospital in Westchester County dedicated solely to rehabilitation medicine. Burke offers both inpatient and outpatient programs for those who have experienced a disabling illness, traumatic injury or joint replacement surgery. Burke is both an acute rehabilitation hospital and medical research center. Burke’s world renowned doctors and therapists provide state-of-the-art treatment, while its research scientists at the Burke Medical Research Institute explore the frontiers of neurological and rehabilitation medicine. All share the Burke mission to ensure that every patient makes the fullest possible recovery from illness or injury regardless of their ability to pay.

###