

INDIALANTIC SURFER HEALING AFTER DEVASTATING EYE INJURY

Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY 6:24 p.m. EST February 19, 2015

SATELLITE BEACH – After the nose of Storm Portman's surfboard sliced open her left eye, Dr. Gary Ganiban ranked her injury as a "10 out of 10" on the severity scale.

"I told her mom that there was a good chance she'd lose that eye," said Ganiban, an ophthalmologist at The Eye Institute for Medicine & Surgery in Melbourne.



"In the 17 years that I've been here, I've had three similar accidents where surfers have had the point of their surfboard lacerate or rupture their globe. It's pretty uncommon — but obviously, it can be devastating to a patient," he said.

Ganiban performed emergency surgery Jan. 15 on Portman, the reigning Eastern Surfing Association girls champion, at Holmes Regional Medical Center. Now, after undergoing a second surgery in Miami, the 14-year-old Indialantic girl is healing better than Ganiban initially expected.

"She's come a long way since her eye was repaired. I'm so hopeful now. She actually has improved her vision, and she's probably not going to lose her eye. There's still a lot of healing to do, but the prognosis is much better than the first day I met her," he said.

The Space Coast surfing community has rallied with a variety of fundraising activities. This weekend features an Eye of the Storm surf contest, a 50-mile casual bike ride and a party at Baroos Beachside

Bar in Indialantic. That's where Portman's mother, Toye Hall, works as a bartender.

As of this morning, an online fundraising drive for Portman's family's expenses not covered by medical insurance had generated \$13,425.

Portman stopped wearing her plastic eyeshield Sunday. Under doctors' advice, she wears sunglasses to help ward off objects from touching her eye.

"I'm doing a lot better. I see shadows. And I was able to see color (Monday)," Portman said during an interview at Pelican Beach Park, the site of the accident.

Portman's pupil remains enlarged, so her eye is sensitive to light. She applies eyedrops every four hours.

"Some mornings I wake up and it has kind of like a toothache pain. A pain resonates in it. And then other times, it itches from the healing," she said.

Portman said she is taken aback by the "crazy" amount of attention her accident has received. News outlets as distant as Australia have chronicled her plight.

During the Locals Only SurFest earlier this month in Satellite Beach, Portman said a little boy she did not know said he was writing a report about her for school.

Portman said she has lost about 20 pounds since the accident. She has resumed schoolwork, and she spends her downtime doing light workouts, playing ukelele and watching "Friends" reruns.

She has a March 4 examination scheduled in West Palm Beach. That's when she hopes to learn her timetable for future surgeries.

"My goal is to be in California this summer surfing in the (National Scholastic Surfing Association) nationals. I want to make it to the (Atlantic Surfing Championships) and be invited to Prime," Portman said, referring to the Surfing America Prime East Series.

Ganiban credits Portman's faith and family with helping her heal and keeping her spirits high.

"You look at what she's gone through and how strong she is about it. She's one of those stories where she can make other people feel strong about what they're going through. It's inspirational when you talk to her," he said.

Benefit event schedule

The Eye of the Storm Surf Contest takes place from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at the north end of Paradise Beach Park in beachside Melbourne. Proceeds from the pro-am event will benefit Storm Portman's family.

A "Storm Riders" charity 50-mile bike ride starts at 8 a.m. at the park.

Sunday, an "after-party" benefit lasts from 1 to 6 p.m. at Baroos Beachside Bar, 810 State Road A1A, Indialantic. Bands include Billy Chapman, Eequator, Fresh Squeeze and 23 Treez.

A crowdfunding benefit drive is also underway. Visit giveforward.com and search for Storm Portman.

