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Former Mary Free Bed patient finds a way to make it work.

**AVID HUNTER CONTINUES SPORT
AFTER SPINAL INJURY**

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – After falling from a tree stand in 1999, hunter Breck Lonier, now 44, sustained a life-changing spinal cord injury that left him in a wheelchair.

Lonier was devastated – physically, emotionally ... in just about every way possible. During two months of treatment at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital, however, his outlook gradually began to shift.

“At first, I thought of all the things I couldn’t do,” says Lonier, a manufacturing manager in Lansing. “But things started to change for me once I decided to focus on what I wanted to do – and resolved to figure out a different way to make it happen.”

The first order of business? Start hunting again.

“Bow hunting is a sport I’m passionate about,” Lonier says. “I grew up in the country and love the outdoors. I was determined to find a way to continue enjoying the sport I’ve loved since I was 12.”

Using equal doses of determination and creativity, Lonier drew on his knowledge of steel fabrication to adapt old hunting techniques to his new circumstances. First, he crafted a custom bow mount for his wheelchair. Next, he designed a 48-square-foot insulated hunting shanty with a wheelchair ramp. Finally, he converted a golf cart that could navigate the rough terrain back and forth between his shanty and his truck.

The hunting shanty was Lonier’s real breakthrough. He ran pulleys to windows all around so he could open any of them from his wheelchair with minimal movement and sound. Lonier eventually built shanties in his two favorite hunting spots – one near Ionia; another in Michigan’s thumb region.

“The shanties have worked so well that I’ve even built them for family members who aren’t in a wheelchair,” he says.

Following his two months at Mary Free Bed and another two months of rehabilitation at home, Lonier drove himself back to his job as manager for fabrication at Roberts Sinto, a maker of foundry machinery in Lansing. He also stays active mentoring other hunting accident victims at Mary Free Bed, creating wood-burning art in the winter, and raising his 12-year-old son.

“After the accident, life was pretty depressing,” Lonier admits. “On bad days, I’d tell myself ‘just wait until tomorrow.’ You know what I learned? Inevitably, things really did look a little better by the next day.”

To arrange an interview with Breck Lonier or learn more about his story, please contact Meg Derrer, Marketing Director, (616) 242-0474, meg.derrer@maryfreebed.com

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Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital is an 80-bed, not-for-profit, acute rehabilitation center. Its mission is to restore independence, hope, and freedom through rehabilitation to people with disabilities. Programs include brain injury; spinal cord injury; stroke and orthopedic; pediatric/adolescent; amputee; lymphedema; vestibular; motion analysis center; rehab technology center; orthotics and prosthetics services; and driver rehab.