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News Release

Music Brings Healing to Utahn with Brain Injury

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Already this year, an estimated 2,000 Utahns have suffered life-altering traumatic brain injuries (TBI) as a result of falls, car crashes, and attempted or completed suicides. Nearly 600 of these individuals have died as a result of their injury.

“Every day in Utah, seven people are hospitalized or die from a TBI,” said Trisha Keller, Manager of the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Violence and Injury Prevention Program. “The vast majority of those injured are older Utahns ages 65 and up. The real tragedy is that most TBIs are preventable.”

According to the UDOH, in 2009, 2,718 Utahns suffered a TBI severe enough to require hospitalization or that resulted in death. Of these, 796 (29.3%) died. The top five leading causes of TBIs in 2009 were falls (36.5%), motor vehicle crashes (16.6%), self-harm (7.1%), motorcycle crashes (6.0%), and bicycle crashes (5.3%).

Laurent Neu was a senior in communications at the University of Utah in 1998, with plans to complete graduate work and begin a career in mediation. On the side, he sang in a professional choir and performed solo work in the community. But Laurent’s life changed drastically when, at age 29, he suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) in a motorcycle crash.

“After the crash, we realized he wouldn’t be able to have a full career in mediation or communication since the speech areas of his brain were affected,” said Laurent’s wife, Kerrie. “So we looked at music as a source of contribution, enjoyment, and a way for

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him to excel at something when so many other things were challenging,” she added.

Laurent’s TBI affected his ability to learn and memorize music. Before the injury, he could sight read and memorize music after going through a song just once or twice, but after, it would take two months or more to learn a new song. “Laurent has worked so hard and it's amazing that he is now able to learn the quantity of music necessary to participate in the Mormon Tabernacle Choir,” said Kerrie. “The TBI has changed our family forever.”

Laurent will do a vocal performance at the 22nd Annual Families and Professionals Conference sponsored by the Brain Injury Association of Utah (BIAU) on October 13, 2011 at the South Towne Exposition Center in Sandy. The conference offers education and support for survivors and family members, health care professionals, educators, and other service providers. Dr. Michael Ballam, Founder and General Director of the Utah Festival Opera and professor of music at Utah State University, will be among the keynote presenters. In addition, presentations on using music and art therapy to treat TBIs, as well enhancing family functioning, are among the highlights of this year’s conference.

To register for the BIAU Conference visit <http://www.biau.org/events/events.html>. Additional TBI-related data and information about Utah’s TBI Fund for survivors are available at <http://health.utah.gov/vipp/traumaticBrainInjury/overview.html>.

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