

Brain injury survivor finds a place that feels like home

By Jane Keller Gordon
Contributing Writer

Westborough - Ten years ago, early in the morning, Jim Lyman Jr., now 50, needed help. He called his mother Janet, who heard his slurred speech, hung up and dialed 911. Lyman, in the meantime, made his way down a narrow staircase to the front door of his house in Marlborough. In the midst of a massive stroke, he had enough awareness to know that he did not want to be carried down. He weighed 350 pounds.

Lyman was taken to Marlborough Hospital, and then taken by MedFlight to UMass Memorial Medical Center, where he spent 19 days in the Intensive Care Unit, much of it on a ventilator.

"Twice they wanted our permission to pull the plug," Janet said.

Semi-comatose and down to 260 pounds, he was discharged to Whittier Rehabilitation Hospital in Westborough. According to Janet, "seven weeks later, he walked out of Whittier with a cane. A week later, he dropped the cane and said that he would never use it again."

Lyman spent a year as an outpatient at Whittier, working hard to recover strength in his right side, and improve his diminished communication skills. He continues rehabilitation, and is now at a healthy weight.

Kristine, Lyman's sister, owns a house in Hudson where he and his mother live. They are fortunate to have the support of a huge extended family, but Janet said that hasn't been enough for her son.

"Jim was heading to 50, and



Left: (l to r) Jim Lyman Jr., Tress Ricker and Ann Coney

Below:
Jim Lyman Jr.

PHOTOS/JANE KELLER GORDON

Our overall mission is to provide a better future for those affected by brain injury. We have four pillars of action: education, support, prevention and advocacy.

Ann Coney

I could see some level of isolation and depression," she said. "His counselor suggested that he connect with a craft group in Westborough for brain injury (BI) survivors."

Scrunching his face, Lyman's response was, "Crafts—no way." Now a few months later, with a big smile on his face, turning red, he said, "It's a family for me."

Janet added, "It's done a world of good for Jim. I see a big change in his attitude."

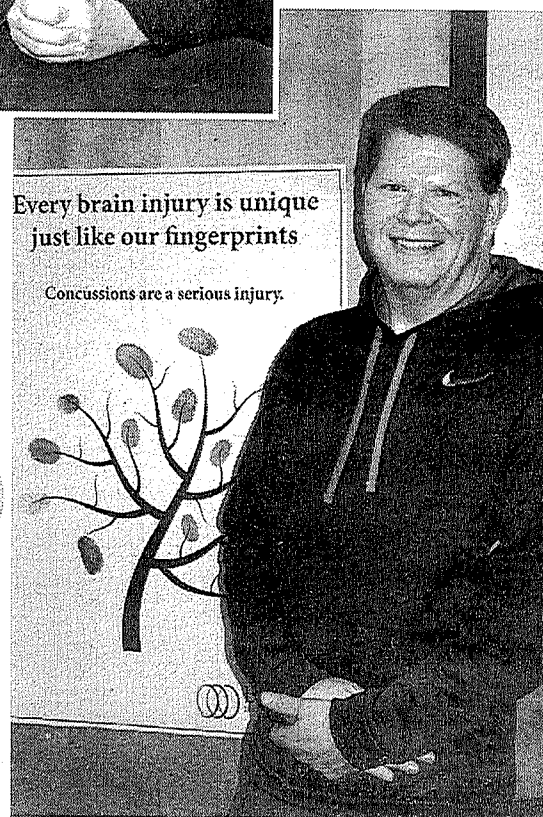
The craft group takes place at the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA). Tress Ricker,

BIA-MA central regional manager, said, "Jim comes to almost everything that we do. He's very active, always in a good mood, and always a cheerleader for the other BI survivors. He's a joy to be around."

On the second Thursday of the month, Lyman gathers with six to 10 other BI survivors for the Creative Minds Craft Group, also known as "crafty critters." Making Halloween masks, St. Patrick's Day t-shirts, and other

Every brain injury is unique just like our fingerprints

Concussions are a serious injury.



He also attends an arts group that meets the first and third Tuesdays of the month.

Lyman has taken a six-week long, once a week "Thrivers Workshop," taught by BI survivor Barbara Webster, the BIA-MA survivor and family education coordinator at the Westborough location. Much of the class is based on a book she wrote, "Lost & Found: A Survivor's Guide for Reconstructing Life after a Brain Injury."

Lyman is very proud to have raised \$850 for the BIA-MA's annual Walk and Roll, which was held in Framingham Sept. 18.

He attended the BIA-MA annual Brain Injury Conference in March 2016. Along with 800 others, he was able to choose among 29 workshops and visit 50 exhibits.

Lyman has also gone on trips to art museums, made friends, and increased his level of comfort at the BIA-MA.

According to Ann Coney, BIA-MA marketing communications associate, "our overall mission is to provide a better future for those affected by brain injury. We have four pillars of action: education, support, prevention and advocacy."

In addition to Westborough, BIA-MA has regional offices in East Wareham and Pittsfield. Each office offers programs, and coordinates a network of family, survivor and caregiver support groups. The Westborough location works with 23 groups.

For more information about the BIA-MA, visit www.biama.org or call 508-475-0032. The Westborough office is located at 30 Lyman St., Suite 10.

themed craft projects, they work on fine motor skills and they laugh.

Lyman attends "Brain Games" on the third Wednesday of the month, as well. The group plays cards and other games that improve cognition.

The first Friday of the month, Lyman is at the "Coffee Club," where he and others chat and do journal writing.