



Scott Sebastian's 13-year-old dog Bullit serves as a calming, positive influence for the chef and stroke survivor.

## MOTIVATED BY HIS LOYAL DOGS, SCOTT SEBASTIAN RECOVERS FROM A LIFE-ALTERING STROKE

It was the middle of the night, and Scott Sebastian was lying on his bedroom floor, startled and confused. Unable to move the left side of his body, he couldn't get up, no matter how hard he tried.

Help arrived, and Sebastian promptly received care at Ascension All Saints Hospital and later at Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital. He was shocked to learn he had suffered a debilitating stroke. A busy chef and former firefighter, he had been leading an active life and was generally in good health.

"It was like I went to bed one night, and the next day I aged 40 years. That's how I felt," he said. "And that's how I have felt ever since."

In early 2019 Sebastian had been looking forward to a busy summer as chef and co-owner of Sebastian's Fine Food & Spirits in Caledonia. Instead, by May, he was facing several months of rehabilitation. Not knowing any stroke survivors, he didn't know what to expect. Fortunately, a caring support system—his daughter,

Cory; his business partner, Patrice; and numerous healthcare professionals at Ascension All Saints—would help him every step of the way.

### Excellent Care and Service

Days blurred into weeks as Sebastian received around-the-clock care for nearly a month at Ascension All Saints. Food service workers brought him low-sodium meatloaf, grilled cheese and mashed potatoes from a cardiac-diet menu. Realizing Sebastian did not have use of his left hand, they opened his yogurt containers and sugar packets, and placed his food tray within easy reach, without him having to ask. Having his own stake in hospitality and quality, Sebastian found the hospital's food surprisingly tasty and was impressed by the attentive service throughout his long stay.

"The service was so good, I wondered if I could tip the workers," he said.

Sebastian viewed his daily physical therapy sessions as an opportunity to get out of his hospital bed and work on his recovery. Physical therapist Megan Kramp's upbeat encouragement did much to re-energize him. Together they focused on how regaining use of each muscle would eventually enable him to play with his dogs and walk around his restaurant.

"The brain learns better when a task is meaningful," Kramp said. "So I helped him connect the dots to the little things that would help him in the long run. Throughout the process, he remained incredibly focused and determined."

### Visiting Home

Sebastian missed his three dogs. Thankfully, he would see them during a home visit and a home assessment with Kramp, courtesy of a wheelchair-accessible rehabilitation van equipped with a ramp and lift. Proceeds from Roma Lodge's 2001 Italian Fest provided funding for the van through All Saints Foundation, with the foundation covering the remaining costs.

"Worth every penny," he said.

Typically used a couple of times every week, the van serves as a critical piece in determining what patients need when they're discharged from the hospital, Kramp said. Without the van, patients would otherwise have to rely on a vehicle from friends or family. And if the vehicle could not accommodate the patient, home assessments could not happen.

Kramp toured Sebastian's ranch-style home room by room, checking for safety issues. She made sure he could access kitchen cupboards and could safely maneuver down hallways using a wheelchair or walker.

She also gave recommendations, such as adding support bars to the bathroom and a seat in the shower.

“Home visits allow us to make modifications, and to also reassure patients and their families that everything is going to be ok,” Kramp said.

Briefly back home, Sebastian hung out with his cherished dogs, who seemed equally excited to see him.

“Visiting home was definitely a highlight of my hospital stay,” he said.

### **A Long Road Back**

Soon, Sebastian was discharged from the hospital and returned home for good. Cory continued to manage the restaurant, while Patrice became his primary caregiver at home.

“They’ve both been tremendously patient and helpful. I really can’t say enough about them,” he said.

With home and outpatient therapy, his balance, muscle control and strength steadily improved. He also continued to receive expert care from Dr. Subbanna Jayaprakash. Then came a big milestone worth celebrating: Sebastian no longer needed a wheelchair.

But like other stroke survivors, he also suffered setbacks. His left arm remained weak and difficult to move, partly due to a previous injury. Frustrated and growing impatient, he wondered when he would be back to normal. Having something to be excited about became an ongoing challenge. He wanted to paint, but couldn’t open paint tubes with one hand. He wanted to take photographs, but couldn’t easily change lenses and batteries with one hand.

The competitor in him wanted more than incremental accomplishments, and not getting them could feel like defeat. It’s not a feeling easily shaken.

“Even now, when I wake up in the morning, what can I look forward to? Not much,” he said. “Because I essentially can’t do anything I enjoy, or I have a very hard time doing it.”

### **Staying Positive**

Sebastian heard about stroke survivors who gave up on their recovery—sat on the couch, gained weight and consequently had more health problems. Determined not to meet the same fate, he quit smoking after his stroke, and continued to eat healthy and stay active. He focused on his goals and kept his sense of humor.

Physical therapist Jacquie Karman tapped into

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**— Cory Sebastian**

Sebastian’s strong-willed, competitive nature by timing him on exercises. The approach inspired him to work even harder. When asked to climb up one step, he’d climb up them all. He tried every exercise without hesitation and never missed an appointment.

“You have to be tough and tenacious,” Karman said. “He kept at it, and just never gave up.”

Over time, Sebastian’s efforts and his healthcare team’s expertise and encouragement reaped big results, Cory said.

“I believe there’s a direct correlation between the amazing progress he’s made and the great care he received,” she said. “The people at Ascension All Saints made all the difference in the world.”

### **A Fresh Perspective**

Prior to his stroke, Sebastian found himself in a rut, void of any passion for hobbies he once loved. But today, it’s clear that his stroke has changed that.

“All this stuff that I thought I’d lost forever—I really miss it, and I can’t wait to get back to it,” he said.

As Sebastian works toward a full recovery and his next set of goals—to regain his ability to cook and paint and to walk anywhere without a cane—inspiration is as close as his restaurant’s walls.

Above a corner table hangs one of his own artistic creations—a large, bold portrait of his beloved dog Bullit, peering straight ahead, excited and focused.



**Making great strides:** Rehabilitation services at Ascension All Saints helped Scott Sebastian regain muscle control and strength.