

A CAR ACCIDENT CRUSHED STEVE EHRETSMAN'S LEG BUT NOT HIS SPIRIT

BY Paris Wolfe

Steve Ehretsman '91 has a leg up on most. Seven legs in fact.

It all began on April 15, 2001 when Ehretsman's real legs were crushed between two cars. Before an early morning meeting, he and two coworkers had stopped at a fast-food restaurant for breakfast. Ehretsman was walking across the drive-through lane when a new driver in a Mercedes SUV hit the gas instead of the brake. The SUV lurched forward and pinned Ehretsman against the steel bumper of a Ford F350.

For a shorter person the accident may have been fatal. At 6-foot-6, Ehretsman's legs were crushed. Though his left leg recovered from the accident, he lost his right leg below the knee.

Today Ehretsman, 33, replaces the missing limb with one of seven prosthetic legs. He has one leg for every day. One for showering. One that looks real. The other four give him stability and movement for his favorite sports... cycling, water sports, running, basketball and tennis.

When he's not playing sports or modeling for a prosthetic company, he is leading life as one of Atlanta's most eligible bachelors. Or so says, a trendy city magazine, *Jezebel*.

Ehretsman isn't bragging. He wants others to know a crushed leg doesn't mean a crushed spirit. Of course, it wasn't easy at first.

"I was in a hospital bed for 30 days. Then, at home I was completely landlocked to a couch. There was a port-a-potty right next to the couch," he recalls. "I couldn't see outside. Talk about depression. I was a guy who always did something."

Ehretsman confesses that he briefly contemplated suicide before coming to grips with his new life. "After operation No. 12, I realized this is me now. I realized I had to do something with my life."

He met with a prosthetist and was fitted with a new leg. After getting a good fit, he asked for more.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW OSTERDAY



Despite the partial loss of his right leg, Steve Ehretsman '91 is more active today than he was before his tragic accident.



"My prosthetist has given me every tool to play basketball, golf, swim... anything I want to do," he explains.

Ehretsman has always led an active life. The

former Cleveland Heights man played basketball and golf at Saint Ignatius. He also played basketball for Ohio University and Boston University.

After college, he worked in sports marketing at Coca-Cola Co. and then Atlanta Beverage Co. when the accident occurred. In 2003, he became director of business development and sports account services for Blue Sky, also in Atlanta. Most recently, he applied to Case Western Reserve's nonprofit masters program with plans to move back to Cleveland in January 2006.

Ehretsman's new legs are taking him further than his old one. "I never water-skied before, now I wakeboard every weekend," he says. "I didn't cycle before, now I'm training for triathlons.

"It's one of the best things that ever happened to me," he says of the accident. "There's deeper meaning to why I got hurt."

Ehretsman is bold about reclaiming his life because he wants other amputees to do the same. He is a one-man marketing machine... talking to school groups and, otherwise, living loud.

"I'm proud of my leg now," he says.

He believes changing attitudes can go a long way toward changing lives. He claims many amputees succumb to their injuries. That can lead to the twin challenges of depression and obesity.

"It's a challenge for amputees to be accepted by themselves and other people," he says.

To help with that acceptance and mobility, Ehretsman's next career goal is to launch a foundation focused on raising acceptance of people with physical challenges, as well as increasing awareness about the prosthetic industry.

"I guess there's a bit of Saint Ignatius spirit in me," he admits. "If we're taught to be a man for others, there's a message in what's happened to me. At the end of my career, I want to have influenced people."



Jezebel magazine recently named Steve Ehretsman '91 one of Atlanta's most eligible bachelors.

