



MINISTERS OF HEALTH AND TRANSPORTATION TO
HEADLINE HAWAIIAN OYSTER ODYSSEY IN SUPPORT OF BRAIN INJURED
SURVIVORS

(TORONTO – JANUARY 26, 2010) - The Brain Injury Association of Canada (BIAC) is cranking up the heat tonight at Toronto's 6th Annual Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey.

The beach-themed event will be held at the site of the first-ever Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey (HOO), The Miller Tavern, 3885 Yonge Street (1 block south of York Mills) on Tuesday, January 26th from 6 to 9 p.m.

Special guests include:

- Beverly Thomson, co-host of CTV's Canada AM, as this year's Master of Ceremonies
- Hon. Deb Matthews MPP, Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- Hon. Kathleen Wynne MPP, Ontario's Minister of Transportation
- Dr. Charles Tator, renowned Toronto neurosurgeon
- Piroska Bata RN, neurotrauma nurse manager
- Gary Otsu, brain injury survivor
- Shirley Johnson, President, Brain Injury Association of Canada
- Ralph Palumbo, Ontario Vice-President, Insurance Bureau of Canada, the presenting sponsor

They will all speak from 7:05 to 7:30 pm.

This year's HOO events will raise over \$150,000. A total of almost \$600,000 has been raised since the first HOO in 2005. Always a great success, HOO events are now being kicked off by passionate volunteers in every province across Canada.

Brain injury is the number one disabler and cause of death for Canadians under 45, despite being a preventable condition. Each year, 50,000 Canadians are affected with a brain injury and incidence rates are continuing to rise. The HOOs are fundraising events that increase brain injury awareness, and promote its prevention.

National sponsors include Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC), TD Bank Financial Group and We Care Home Health Services. Supporting sponsors include the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation, Bombardier, CIBC, Prism Medical, Scotiabank, Brave Consulting, the Posluns Family Foundation, Air Canada, Alpha Laboratories and Goodmans Law Firm.

Hawaiian Oyster Odysseys raise funds to advocate for survivors such as Gary Otsu (see backgrounder below).

Otsu and other survivors will share their inspirational stories at each of the Odysseys starting in Toronto on January 26th.

Other 2010 Hawaiian Oyster Odysseys will be held in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal, Fredericton, Charlottetown, Halifax and St. John's.

Each event will feature tropical decor, oyster bars, tropical cocktails, a silent auction and stories from survivors.

About:

In 2003 the Brain Injury Association of Canada was established with the mandate to improve the quality of life for all Canadians affected by acquired brain injury and promote its prevention. BIAC is also dedicated to facilitate post-trauma research, education and advocacy in partnership with national, provincial/territorial and regional associations and other stakeholders.

The mission of the Brain Injury Society of Toronto is to enhance the quality of life for persons, in the City of Toronto, who are living with the effects of acquired brain injury, through education, awareness, support and advocacy.

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For more information, please contact:

Howard Brown
Brown and Cohen Communications and Public Affairs
(416) 844-1180
howard@brown-cohen.com

or

Kate More
PR Writer Extraordinaire
(416) 825-7739
kate@rotman-pr.com

SURVIVOR CALLED A “WALKING MIRACLE” AFTER LIVING 20 YEARS WITH BRAIN INJURY

TORONTO - Gary Otsu, a brain injury survivor, will be a speaker at the Brain Injury Association of Canada's Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey this year.

Spend an hour with Gary Otsu and it is hard not to feel inspired. Not only has he been living with his brain injury for 20 years, he also cracks a joke every third sentence, is living medication-free, and won't let you buy your own coffee.

Otsu was 19 years old when he first started feeling the pain in his head. After a couple months the headaches had become unbearable and Otsu went to see a doctor. After this moment, Otsu's life would drastically change. In one day, Otsu went from his family physician, to a neurologist, then to the neurosurgery wing of his local hospital, where he was immediately admitted as a patient.

At age 19, Otsu discovered he was living with eight tumours in his brain and two in his spinal cord. Otsu is different from other brain injury survivors, because his brain injury was not caused by a harmful event – his injury occurred naturally and without explanation.

“Yeah, I've been called the walking miracle,” said Otsu, “I guess people are amazed that I'm still alive.”

Over the course of four months, Otsu celebrated his 20th birthday, underwent three major surgeries and had five weeks of radiation therapy. In April, following the December day that Otsu was first admitted, his neurosurgeon told him that four tumours had grown back. Otsu's fourth and final surgery to remove the new tumours took place that May.

Otsu's last surgery was 15 years ago and he has not needed to see a doctor for his brain injury since.

“The doctor told me then that there was nothing else they could do,” said Otsu. “I was free to go, unless I start having bad headaches again, then I could go back.”

Today Otsu says that he “loves volunteering” and divides his time between Community Head Resources Service (CHIRS) and Sunnybrook Hospital. As well, Otsu spends two nights a week attending Brain Injury Society of Toronto (BIST) meetings and spends every Friday night cooking for up to nine people on his floor.

“A perfect day is just feelin good,” says Otsu.

Gary Otsu and other survivors will share their inspirational stories at each of the Odysseys starting in Toronto on January 26.

