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After years of adversity, Waterford couple welcomes new life

BY RACHEL LEON
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Less than a month before his first wedding anniversary, Rob Wall found himself hospitalized, paralyzed from the shoulders down.

On vacation with his family in August 2005, he had been out boating on Rehoboth Bay, Del., and decided to try diving off the side of the boat.

The water was only 12 inches deep. The snap and the accompanying numbness were almost immediate. He lay face down in the water until his brother-in-law turned him over.

Fast-forward four years, and Waterford residents Rob and Amanda Wall, who just celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary Sept. 18, are expecting their first child, due Dec. 25.

It wasn't an easy road. After five days in ICU, Rob spent five months in a New Jersey hospital and a subsequent eight months in outpatient care.

The couple relocated to Carlsbad, Calif., where Rob participated in a recovery program called Project Walk. After one and a half years, Rob was able to stand and walk short distances with the help of a walker.

By fall 2008, the recovery Rob had experienced gave the couple hope that they could still have a child, even though they would be unable to conceive naturally.

The Walls moved in with Amanda's parents in Waterford. A neighbor recommended Shady Grove Fertility in Leesburg, after he had received successful fertility treatments from Dr. Naveed Khan.

"He was the one who really gave us some hope," Amanda said.

Before Rob and Amanda could begin the process of in vitro fertilization, they had to

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Amanda Wall
Waterford

go through individual testing; both to make sure that they needed IVF, and that IVF would most likely work.

From the time the process begins to the time of the first pregnancy test is about two months, Khan said.

In a case where the male is unable to conceive naturally, IVF is done through a process called Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection, where one sperm is injected directly into one egg.

If the egg is successfully fertilized, it will begin dividing and growing, maturing into a blastocyst by day five.

Since, Rob and Amanda, both 31, are young enough, only a single-embryo transfer was necessary. On the first try, the embryo implanted.

"It was a beautiful blastocyst, a picture-perfect embryo," Khan said.

Several more embryos were frozen, in case Amanda's pregnancy was in some way unsuccessful, or in case the couple later wish to have more children.

Khan was struck by the couple's response to Rob's accident, and said both seemed to be "positive" and "upbeat."

"Their story is just so



Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Raymond Thompson

Mandy and Rob Wall, of Waterford, are expecting their first child in December, four years after an accident left Rob a quadriplegic.

touching," Khan said.

Both Rob and Amanda are excited about their first child.

"I can't wait," Rob said. "We've got furniture set up in the bedroom now. We're nesting, which is kind of fun. We're picking out names -- everything that everyone else does. It's a nice return to normalcy."

The future will bring its own set of challenges.

"I do occasionally worry that I'll not be able to be as involved in my child's life as a normal parent would," Rob said. "But I try to focus on all the things I can do as opposed to the things I won't be able to do."

Both of the Walls agreed that, in the face of a tragedy, the best thing to do is keep fighting.

"Make the choice to move on," said Amanda, who works as a social worker. "Don't get stuck in the negativity."

"Allow yourself to be affected by it," Rob said. "Open yourself up to the fact that there will be good days and bad

days. If you stay focused, what you want will come to fruition.

"Here we are five years later, and we're starting a family."

To help others in similar situations, the Walls have spearheaded Care Code, a non-profit organization to support those with spinal cord injuries.

Care Code creates individualized Web sites for those with spinal cord injuries, so updates can be posted about their condition. Visit Care Code at www.carecode.org or Rob Wall's Web site, www.supportthewall.net.

Care Code also gives money to those with spinal cord injuries so that they can attend exercise-based recovery programs similar to Project Walk, the program that helped Rob. Care Code will be launching in 2010, and just completed its first fundraiser.

"This baby has really helped us to shift our focus from the injury [and] move on from the tragedy," Amanda said.