

## Surf therapy

Hawaii's nonprofit group AccesSurf helps a paralyzed 12-year-old catch waves

June 12, 2009

By Kaylee Noborikawa



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Joey Gibbs, 12, snorkeled yesterday with Mark Marble, president of AccesSurf Hawaii. Gibbs, who was paralyzed after a motocross mishap, surfed for the first time yesterday.

When Sheila Gibbs learned that her son was paralyzed in a motocross accident, she never imagined that she'd be watching her 12-year-old Joey surf in Hawaii.

"God has created an amazing young man," she said after seeing him surf in Waikiki yesterday. "His attitude is unbelievable and that's half the battle."

Joey Gibbs, paralyzed from the waist down, surfed for the first time yesterday with the help of AccesSurf Hawaii. The Gibbs family, of Ocala, Fla., joined him in the water, surfing and snorkeling at Publics surf spot in Waikiki.

"It felt great (to watch him surf)," said Gibbs. "It was a confidence booster for him to show him that he could do anything."

Joey, the youngest of six children, had always dreamed of coming to Hawaii and surfing, but it didn't seem possible after the accident. He wondered how he would push his wheelchair through the sand and get into the water, said a spokeswoman from AccesSurf, a nonprofit organization that specializes in providing beach access to people who are physically or mentally handicapped.

"Surfing was easier than I thought, to be honest," said Joey, who surfed tandem -- lying on a foam pad and helped by a volunteer surfer.

"The smile on his face was so big," said Mark Marble, president and chief executive officer of AccesSurf Hawaii. "It was incredible. He must've caught 15, 20 waves."

Joey lost use of his legs after a motocross accident in September. According to his father, Joey hit a jump wrong during training for an upcoming race, and broke his back and severed his spinal cord.

"When the doctors told me he was paralyzed, I was overwhelmed, in shock," said his mother. "On the third day I was thanking God he was alive. As bad as the situation was, there was just so much to be thankful for."

Since he returned home from the hospital, Joey has maintained his active lifestyle, riding four-wheelers and an adapted Go Kart that is driven by hand controls, said his father, Matt. "One of the first questions he asked when he got out of the hospital was 'What am I going to race?'" Joey has already raced in two Go Kart events, coming in ninth and second place.

The Gibbs family arrived in Hawaii on Tuesday and will tour the island until Thursday. Their itinerary includes a visit to Pearl Harbor, the North Shore, the Polynesian Cultural Center, and a helicopter tour of the volcanoes on the Big Island.

The entire trip, including airfare, hotel and spending money, was sponsored by the Dream Come True Foundation, which heard about Joey's dream when he was undergoing rehabilitation in Florida. The foundation asked AccesSurf whether they could help, and Marble accepted immediately.

"That's what we're here for," he said. "We're a resource for families with disabilities that can help them access the ocean in a safe and beneficial way." Marble started AccesSurf Hawaii in 2006 and has 25 years of experience in therapeutic recreation.

The nonprofit organization hosts a beach day on the first Saturday of every month at Barbers Point to help people with disabilities surf and swim. "Participants start off saying, 'Wow, I don't know how I'm going to do this,' but once they get in the water, the life and energy just rolls back into them," said Marble.

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