

# Hand re-attached after accident

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accident severed Lewis Layman's hand in mere seconds. Less than 24 hours later, however, his right appendage had been reattached by doctors in Seattle.

The Emida resident went to work per his normal routine Nov. 19 at the Medley Cedar Mill in Santa.

"I was on the post knife machine, which cuts the logs down to post size and makes the posts. I was at work at 5 a.m. and out on the floor and everything was going good," Mr. Layman said. "About 8 a.m. I heard a crunch and felt a burn. I looked down and my hand was gone."

His right hand had been cut off just above the wrist. Mr. Layman quickly made his way to the office of Ron Cook.

"I was losing quite a bit of blood, but I walked in and said, 'Ron, I think I cut myself pretty good.'"

A towel was quickly wrapped around Mr. Layman's exposed wrist and he was hustled out the door and an ambulance was called. Wade Medley was outside and saw that Mr. Layman had been injured.

"He put me into his truck and we started toward St. Maries," Mr. Layman said. "He was yelling at me to stay awake and to stay with him. He kept telling me to hang in there. And I was fighting for my life."

The emergency room at Benewah Community Hospital had been alerted to expect Mr. Layman. Upon arrival, a tourniquet was put on his wrist.

After Mr. Layman had left the mill, Mr. Cook had returned to the floor and called out for the machines to be stopped. He and Russ Spray located Mr. Layman's hand, which had traveled down the conveyor belt.

"It had been stopped within three feet of being cut up," Mr. Layman said. "But they were able to shut the conveyor belt down and retrieve my hand. Russ went to the Fernwood Mercantile and put it on ice and then drove it into St. Maries."

At the hospital, Mr. Layman was relieved to learn that he would live.

"I had been asking if I was going to die, and the doctors assured me I wouldn't. Once I knew I wasn't going to die, I was cracking jokes. I was telling everybody if they need a hand, I'll give them a hand," he said.

Mr. Spray called to let the doctors know he had Mr. Layman's hand. Plans were made to transport Mr. Laymen to Harborview in Seattle.

"They took me to Coeur d'Alene by ambulance and then put me on a jet to Seattle," Mr. Layman said.

During a 13-hour surgery, surgeons reconnected Mr. Layman's hand. Doctors took veins out of Mr. Layman's leg and used them to reestablish blood flow between his wrist and hand.

Skin was also grafted over the injury. A series of pins were also used to re-connect the bones. Pins and a rod were used to limit movement of the area so it could heal.

"It's just amazing to me," he said. "They don't think I will ever bend my wrist again, but they think that I could regain 75 percent use of my hand."

Mr. Layman was in the hospital for a week following his surgery. Though he is only able to slightly twitch his fingers, Mr. Laymen said his doctors are excited about his progress considering the injury he sustained.

As part of his recovery, Mr. Layman has a special glove that he puts on daily to exercise his fingers. The robotic machine pushes his fingers up and down for him. Occasionally, Mr. Laymen can feel the electricity spark in his nerves.

Though he is left-handed, Mr. Layman said it has still been difficult to adjust to everyday life from opening a bottle of pop to putting his shoes on.

"It's been hard and there's not really one thing that is the most difficult to do," he said.

Mr. Laymen and his girlfriend, Kimberly Babcock, moved to the area from Washington five months ago so her daughter could be closer to family. He said Ms. Babcock has been his right hand throughout the experience.

"She has been right by my side and has been a great help," he said. "I'm also very thankful to my crew. They saved my life and my hand."