

By Danielle Ray

31-year-old Malden resident James Costello echoes the sentiments of his fellow Greg Hill Foundation beneficiaries by saying he cannot begin to thank them enough for what they did for him – and in such a quick and timely manner.

“The One Fund Boston money will be there for victims, but [the Greg Hill Foundation] money was the lifesaving break between what had happened and the One Fund,” James said. “I don’t think they realize how much it means not only to the victims, but to our families. It was the first act of kindness, and they kept doing it.”

James was standing outside of Boylston Street restaurant Forum along with a group of friends the day of the marathon. They were waiting for their friend to cross the finish line and then go out for drinks and food to celebrate.

When the first bomb went off, James said he immediately knew it was not related to the marathon as others had initially thought.

“I had been to the marathon before, so I knew it was not a canon; right away I knew it was a bomb,” he said. James said it looked like the bomb came from a building, so he headed into the street. He remembers putting his hand on a barricade right before the second bomb went off.

“The second boom sent me flying over the barricades,” James said. “It was pretty brutal. It hit me from my right side. I remember wandering down the street, hoping for the best – but I started to think that my friends were gone. It was pretty crazy.”

James said he sat down on the curb, and then noticed that he was on fire.

“It did not dawn on me that people were going to be losing limbs,” he said. “I knew I was in pretty good shape. I pulled a few nails out of my stomach; that’s when I started thinking [my friends] were gone.”

James suffered hearing loss and severe burns head to toe along the right side of his body. He was at Massachusetts General Hospital for 15 days following the bombing, where he received several surgeries. He then spent 14 days at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital.

“I get ringing in both of my ears, and this kind of white noise,” he said. “It’s never really quiet anymore.”

James’ parents, who are from Somerville, were in Atlantic City when they got the call about the bombing. They drove eight hours back to him, not knowing what was really going on. His parents, brother and sister stayed with him every single night while he was in the hospital and at rehab, a total of one month straight, and James said that meant the world to him.

“One of the things the money from the Greg Hill Foundation let me do is get appreciation gifts for everyone in my family; they were there every night,” he said. “My mom was so stressed out she broke out in shingles.”

James said he is not exactly sure of the “origin of the first step” with the Greg Hill Foundation getting in touch with him, only that they were there to help him very quickly.

“Adam [Benoit] called and my dad answered my phone,” he recalls. “Adam said they wanted to come and see us. I had no idea about the first donation – I still did not know until a week later when my family told me. I was in shock, and very appreciative. If I had known that I would have jumped out of my hospital bed.”

Not only did the Greg Hill Foundation immediately get in touch with a number of bombing victims, they also asked James and the others to pass along names to them if they heard of anyone else that need financial assistance.

“Once I was out of the hospital and walking around, I really wanted to be involved and see how I could help,” said James. He remembers walking the hallways at Spaulding, asking other bombing victims if they wanted the Greg Hill Foundation to contact them to become a beneficiary.

One month after James received the initial donation from the Greg Hill Foundation, they called him again to say they had another donation for him. He also attended the bombing victim’s fundraiser along with other victims and it was there the GHF surprised them with a third donation.

James said he felt it was important to attend the fundraiser, as well as any future GHF events for the bombing victims, in honor of his friends, who may or may not be able to attend themselves depending on if “they are having a bad day”.

“I don’t know who does what but Erin [Lynch] and Adam [Benoit] and [FMP Marketing Director] Kaitlyn [Montagna] are getting all kinds of stuff done, running around the fundraisers with their heads cut off,” he said. “I want to recognize all the hard work they are putting in.”

James said he has stayed in touch with Adam, and is aware Adam will be running the 2014 Boston Marathon for the Greg Hill Foundation. James said he is happy to attend any GHF fundraisers he and other bombing victims are invited to.

“It’s nice to check in and see how everyone is doing, nice to see the other people and see them doing well. The [Greg Hill Foundation] gives us the opportunity to see each other and how everyone is going forward.”

James said he has also been able to pay his mortgage with the funds, and not worry about having to rush back to work - enabling him to spend time with his recovering friends Paul and JP, and many others.

“It took a huge weight off,” he said of the Greg Hill Foundation donation. “Most of the impact was the immediate piece of mind with the bills. Being able to not worry about the financial aspect of things was pretty big. That was before anyone knew what they were getting from the One Fund, or if they were even getting anything. It was one less thing to worry about. That was the major impact – it was the first large donation that a lot of the victims got.”

James was able to keep up with his bills, and also take the time to recover and help his friends in their recovery process. He has not yet returned to work at Harvard University (they have been extremely supportive of him), but instead spends his day working around his house and hanging out with and supporting friends who have lost limbs and such.

“I feel like I am getting pretty close to going back to work,” he said.

James said he is getting around “pretty good” these days, though he is facing the decision of having surgery on his knee. It has been bothering him since the bombing, where he took shrapnel in the leg. If he gets the surgery, he will have to have the same surgery every few years.

“I am contemplating doing it; although it’s uncomfortable, I can deal with it,” James said of his leg pain. “I would almost rather get used to it, and get away from doctors for a while.”

When it comes to the emotional scarring, he said he is “day to day”.

“I think for the most part I am ok, but just being part of larger group of friends and seeing the devastation that happened to them has been really tough. The whole thing is pointless. Nobody ran away with 100 million dollars; it was a senseless act. It is kind of hard. Me personally, I am moving on and trying not to think about it, but it has affected my thoughts. It is involuntary. I catch myself thinking about it, but it was a once in a lifetime deal. But it does creep into your thoughts here and there.”

James said he cannot get over how the people from the Greg Hill Foundation reached out to him and so many others, in person and with a smile on their face.

“They personally got in touch with people, and personally came and met you and wished you well,” James said. “The emphasis is on personal. You get a lot of donations from people you know, but the Greg Hill Foundation people came to see me. They put a personal touch on it.

“It was great, never mind that they are such nice people. Everyone is smiling, asking how everything is going, and saying hope you guys are getting better. Those kinds of things are over and above; they put a smile on your face.”

James said it is nearly impossible to thank the Greg Hill Foundation, One Fund, and other fundraisers that have helped him and so many other Boston Marathon bombing victims out over the last eight months.

“You can’t put into words being able to take the time to recover and not worry about certain things. I couldn’t imagine dealing with the bomb and also dealing with normal life, the emotional aspect,” he said.

“The Greg Hill Foundation took away the worries in my life. I was living on my own and had to pay my own bills. There is now way to tell how much they impacted my life. The donations were a peace of mind at a time where nobody had any. Basically, they have no idea how big that thank you is.

“Sometimes you say thank you to be polite, sometimes you say it because you mean it. Sometimes you say it because there is no other way to say it. You can put a monetary value on it, but it wasn’t the money - it was that they bought you a little bit of hope.”