

Story below

A freak bull-riding accident has left 25-year-old Bobby Lee "Leroy" Martin partially paralyzed. He communicates with his eyes, blinking once for "yes" and twice for "no."

Local churches have embraced him.

His mother stays by his side at Britthaven of Edenton, asking only for others' prayers.



Hilda Jones holds a memento from her son's bull-riding career. Martin is shown at right.



"It's been hard on all of us. We're all trusting he's going to come out of it OK."

— Hilda Jones, Martin's mother

A MOTHER'S LOVE

By Sean Jackson
Staff Writer

Bobby Lee Martin knew the risks he took every time he climbed atop a bull seeking an 8-second ride.

But his luck ran out in July, when Martin suffered a serious head injury during a bull-riding event.

His mother, Hilda Jones, does the talking for her 25-year-old son, better known as "Leroy." They've been in Edenton for three weeks.

He's been hospitalized, virtually in a coma, since the accident.

"Hopefully, he'll be getting better soon and we'll be going home soon," Jones said during an interview on a rainy, gray Sunday afternoon.

The Randolph County woman has spent the past three weeks watching and praying for her son.

Leroy spends most of his time at Britthaven of Edenton, a residential health-care facility.

"Home" is in Liberty, about 20 miles southeast of Greensboro.

Doctors can't say when — or if — he'll recover enough to go home, Leroy's mom said.

It appears to be breaking Jones' heart, but not her faith that Leroy will return home again.

Leroy passed through several facilities in the Piedmont before Jones called Britthaven, a place that had been recommended to her.

It's a move she's glad she and her son made.

"The others, I just don't think they were trying to do anything for him," Jones said.

That's been far from the case at Britthaven.

"Everybody down here just has a warm attitude," she said. "I just want him to get better and get home, that's all."

The injury

Bull riding has been described as America's first extreme sport. It's dangerous. Jones said Leroy knew that. So did she.

While she enjoys watching others get swung around, holding tightly to a leather rope, she didn't like watching Leroy compete.

"I was always holding on the person beside me," she said. "Every time."

Then came July 7, in Silver Valley Bobby was doing what he'd loved to do ever since he was 15 — riding a bull.

But it turned tragic. A bull stepped on his head, crushing the left side of his skull.

He was rushed to a Winston-Salem Hospital.

Jones had worked that night at her job at a convenience store. On the way home, she happened across a friend who'd been to the

rodeo.

Since that Friday night, Jones has rarely left Leroy's bedside. She typically pulls 12-hour days at Britthaven. Breaks are rare.

"I've been with him every day since he's been in the hospital," she said.

Jones has two other children — daughter Melissa, 30, and younger son Joshua, 23.

"It's been hard on all of us," Jones, 49, said.

A slow recovery

Until her son is released, she plans to remain as near Leroy as she can, recalling his smile, talking to him whenever he wakes up.

"Ever since he's a baby," she said, "he's got that little smile."

Jones said her son can blink his right eye, even signal yes or no to certain questions — one blink is

yes, two means no.

"He knows we're here," she said.

He has some movement in his right hand and leg, something the doctors doubted would ever happen again.

Jones said she's put her faith in a higher power to take care of Leroy, to get him home again.

She's patiently waiting for the day when Leroy may speak again. (He's currently using a tracheotomy tube to breathe.)

"I'll just be glad when he starts talking to me," she said. "I get so lonesome sometimes."

Helping hands

Local churches helped Jones find an apartment on North Broad Street, just a few-minutes' drive to Britthaven.

They supplied furniture,

even pitched in to pay her December rent and get her a tank of heating oil.

Family members visit when they can, Jones said, but it was just her and Leroy over Thanksgiving.

A new friend, Chowan Hospital volunteer Ann Liston, took Jones out to eat Thanksgiving dinner at a local restaurant.

"If any one has something to give to her, I'm sure she could use it," Liston said in an e-mail. "The thing she wants most is prayers for her son."

Though still saddened by Leroy's injuries, Jones smiles whenever she talks about the people here who have helped her.

"I just want to thank everybody for what they've done so far," she said.

For now, she just wants spiritual support, as she and her son get by one day at a time.

"I just want prayer. I just want him to get better, that's the main thing."

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Tax breaks for seniors available

300 local homeowners already taking advantage of Homestead exclusion

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

A change in state law means some disabled and senior citizens (age 65 and over) in Chowan County will be paying smaller property tax bills in the future.

It will allow them to make \$25,000 and still file for a special exclusion to lower the amount of real estate tax they pay annually on their homes.

Currently, they must make less than \$20,500 to qualify.

To illustrate how the law works, Chowan County Tax Supervisor Linda Hendrix offered the following example.

If an eligible person's income totals \$20,000 (and he lives outside the city

limits of Edenton) and the value of his house and lot totals \$75,000, an exclusion of \$37,500 — half its worth — would be allowed.

Their tax bill would cost them \$228.75 under the current county tax rate of 61 cents per \$100,000 of appraised property value.

The property tax rate for those living in Edenton is currently 85 cents per \$100,000 because they pay both town and county taxes.

The Homestead Act itself, adopted as a state law in the early 1970s, has been around for quite a while, Hendrix noted.

And while other area tax administrators have said they don't believe everyone who is eligible is taking advantage of the law, Hendrix

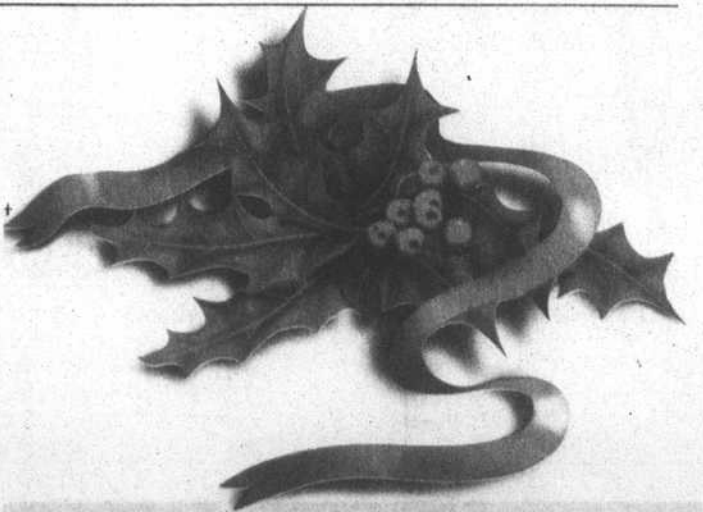
believes that's not necessarily the case in Chowan County.

"I believe that many of those who are eligible are aware of it," she said. "In fact we have about 300 taxpayers in our county who are already receiving it. But for those who are just hearing about it, they need to be aware that they will need to come in and apply to receive the exclusion."

A spouse's income will also be counted toward the amount of the exclusion even if the home is owned by only the husband or wife, she said.

Application forms will be available starting in January.

Hendrix said taxpayers interested in learning whether they are eligible for the exclusion may contact the Chowan County Tax Office at 482-8486 for further assis-



Nine days to go!

Edenton's annual Christmas Candlelight Tour begins next Friday, Dec. 7. Events continue through Saturday, Dec. 8.

There are 15 homes on this year's tour, all to be decked out in holiday finery! Cost is \$25.

Some public buildings will be open without charge.

Free events will also include caroling in the 1767 Courthouse Friday at 6 p.m., and the Edenton-Chowan Christmas Parade Saturday at 11 a.m.

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Doors Open at 6:00pm

Tickets - \$6.00 each 482-1655

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