

Helmet saved Cody Hartung's life

Verendrye Electric Cooperative (VEC) Purchasing and Warehouse Supervisor Cody Hartung has never skimmed when he purchases his motorcycle helmets. And he always wears a helmet when he rides. On July 2, those safety practices likely saved his life.

"I'm convinced I'd have been dead," Hartung says. "I tell people to wear your helmet. It literally can save your life."

Hartung doesn't actually remember the accident that left him lying on a gravel road unconscious. It was in the days afterwards when he examined the beating his helmet took, learned that his insurance company had declared his motorcycle "totaled," and saw the photographs others had taken of the dead deer that he realized how close he'd come to death.

That morning, on his way to the Velva VEC office where he works, Hartung jumped on his Enduro motorcycle — his routine form of transportation in the summers — and headed toward Velva from his home in Surrey. The next thing he knew, he was riding in an ambulance rather than on his motorcycle. Another motorist had found him and called 9-1-1.

"I have no recollection of the accident," Hartung said. "When I came to, I was in the ambulance. I remember feeling pain in my neck. I think I remember a point of recognition where I saw a deer coming from my left. I really watch for deer, but I think there was tall grass and it came up out of the grass."

Hartung recovered without experiencing any long-term injuries. He says the fact that he was wearing a good helmet, motorcycle riding jacket and gloves helped minimize his injuries.

Pastimes such as motorcycling, bicycling, auto racing and skiing carry risks of head injury leading to death or permanent disability. Helmets are the single most effective means of preventing these injuries.

"I think a good helmet is the best investment you make," Hartung said. "You want a helmet that is a good fit, it's tight but still comfortable. And you want a helmet that is hard enough to protect you from those impacts."

When purchasing a helmet, look for the Department of Transportation sticker that indicates the helmet meets DOT standards. Hartung goes one step further. He buys helmets that are also SNELL certified because the SNELL Foundation has the most demanding helmet standards. (www.smf.org)

"I've been buying SNELL helmets since 1984," he said. "You should replace them every five years because the materials can age. They keep improving the helmets, too."

Hartung spent a few weeks on crutches, but had no broken bones or permanent injuries. He said the deer must have died instantly because there were deer remnants all over the gravel road and on his motorcycle. The deer lay right near the roadside.

"If I hadn't been wearing my helmet, it would have been curtains for me too," he said. "I can't say enough now about how important it is."



This battered helmet saved Cody Hartung's life. Hartung was wearing it when his motorcycle collided with a deer.

Motorcycle safety habits reap big rewards

The number of fatalities on motorcycles rose from four deaths to 13 from 2006 to 2008, according to the N.D. Department of Transportation (NDDOT). NDDOT offers these motorcycle safety tips:

- Be on high alert at intersections. Approximately seven of every 10 motorcycle crashes occur at intersections. Also, check rearview mirrors before stopping to prevent rear-end crashes.
- Use headlights day and night, and wear brightly colored clothing, with retro-reflective material when riding at night.
- Avoid riding in a car's blind spot. Drive at a speed consistent with driving abilities. Do not use alcohol or drugs prior to riding.

More information on motorcycle riding and safety in North Dakota is available online at www.dot.nd.gov. NDDOT partners with ABATE to provide motorcycle safety classes called Rider Courses for the public. Information about the Motorcycle Safety program is available at www.ndmsp.com.