

# You've got to hand it to the medics

Saw victim full of praise for rescuers and for surgeons who reattached his hand.

HANK SCHOUTEN

WHEN John Bramley cut his left hand off in a saw accident he left it where it fell and walked upstairs to tell his mate.

Less than 24 hours after the accident, Mr Bramley, a retired Palmerston North joiner, was sitting up in bed in Hutt Hospital cracking jokes.

Thanks to medics, Hastings-based Lowe Corporation rescue helicopter and the plastic surgery team at Hutt Hospital, his hand has been reattached. With intensive physiotherapy, he expects to be using it again in three months.

Mr Bramley was full of praise yesterday for everyone who helped him — “they’ve all been bloody terrific”.

“They’ve done a wonderful job. When I sawed it off I didn’t give it a hope in hell. I still can’t believe how it’s been put back on there.”

The only thing missing was his ring finger — surgeon Charles Davis decided it was too damaged to be functional again.

“All that means is I can’t get married again,” Mr Bramley said.

He was helping a friend renovating a house at Herbertville, on the Hawke’s Bay coast near Dannevirke, when the accident happened about 10am on Thursday morning.

He was cutting skirting boards on a bench saw and was clearing a piece of timber or something when his hand was caught.

The fast-spinning tungsten blade sliced diagonally through his hand from the base of his thumb to his ring finger, leaving just his little finger still attached.

Despite his injury, Mr Bramley walked up the stairs to tell his mate



**Recovery mode:** John Bramley, of Palmerston North, whose hand was reattached after it was cut off by a saw.

Picture: ROSS GIBLIN

Rex Tobeck. Mr Tobeck rang 111 and then hopped on his quad bike and raced across the nearby golf course to get help from a medic.

When they came back the medic picked up the severed hand and put it into a refrigerator to keep it cool.

Meanwhile, the helicopter was called and by that afternoon Mr

Bramley was in Hutt Hospital being prepared for the 7½-hour operation.

Mr Davis said time had been critical. When Mr Bramley arrived at the hospital the theatre was in use so he began preparing the severed hand, identifying the veins, nerves and other tissue that would need to be reconnected.

The operation was a team effort involving himself, anaesthetist Peter Tobin and plastic surgery registrar Meredith Simcock.

When the theatre became available the priority was to restore the blood supply to muscles in Mr Bramley's hand. Without that the tissue dies within six hours.

The bones were then stabilised with plates, in preparation for the remainder of the operation. In all they rejoined four main bones, two arteries, two veins, seven or eight nerves, 12 tendons and about six different muscles. Most of it required microscopic surgery using stitches thinner than a strand of fine hair.