

Life-changing surgery restores retired police officer

By CRYSTAL SIMMONS | Posted: Sunday, April 7, 2013 4:00 pm

Less than a year after receiving a life-changing operation, retired police officer Timothy Cox is back-pain free and taking up activities he hasn't been able to do in almost a year.

Cox's struggle with back pain began 10 years ago after a 30 year career with the Houston Police Department.

"It slowly started getting worse over the years," he said. "In April and May, it got to the point where I couldn't stand in one spot. I had difficulty walking. It just got so bad I couldn't stand it anymore, couldn't stand anywhere, couldn't lay down, couldn't do anything."

In the months that followed, Cox, once active in martial arts and sports, had to quit the activities he loved. Earlier, he had tried medication and physical therapy, but nothing helped.

"For years I didn't know what it was," said Cox. "I was very active in sports and martial arts. As time progressed, it got worse and worse and my body would compensate – and I didn't know it was – to eliminate most of the pain.

My threshold for the pain was pretty high, but it just got progressively worse over the years."

Fed up, Cox paid a visit to Dr. Alexander Mohr, a board-certified orthopedic spine surgeon at St. Luke's who made a surprising discovery.

"Basically the vertebra has a hole in it that nerves go through," said Cox. "Mine literally tightened up. It was squeezing the nerve."

For Mohr, the biggest shock was seeing Cox complete day-to-day activities with his level of pain.

"He had a very classic aging spine," said Mohr. "What was so impressive was that he was still walking. A lot of people with spines that bad would be in a wheel chair."

While laminectomy are common, relatively few surgeons do the minimally invasive procedure because specialized training and an operating microscope are required, said Mohr.

Instead of a 4 inch incision through skin, muscle and bone, Mohr's technique would involve a 2 mm incision that worked around the soft tissues.

As expected, the surgery went off without a hitch. In July, Mohr removed part of the bone around Cox's vertebra, relieving pressure in his lumbar region. Within weeks of the procedure, Cox felt better than he had in months.

“I had surgery in July, and I was up and walking that day,” he said. “After the first two weeks, every day got a little bit better.”

However, years of compensating for his bad back left Cox with bad posture and other problems that affected his spine and caused pain.

He began physical therapy at St. Lukes, where he stretched and learned how to hold himself correctly.

“Within a couple months, there was no pain at all,” he said. “And if there ever is, I know how to correct it.”

Now Cox is making the most of his retirement and is back in martial arts and sports.

“I couldn’t be happier with the results,” he said. “Dr. Mohr and the surgical team at SLHV have given me back my life.”