

Surgeons rebuild jaw shattered by student's gun

▶ A Redlands school principal is facing a series of reconstructive operations.

By Douglas E. Beeman
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Richard Facciolo

LOMA LINDA
It took just a second for a troubled student to blast school Principal Richard Facciolo's jaw from his head.

It may take up to a dozen operations and a year or more for surgeons to completely rebuild it.

Yesterday, surgeons explained how they used some novel techniques to complete the biggest part of their task: Creating a new jaw and lower face for the 44-year-old Facciolo.

From here, surgeons must wait — possibly for months — for swelling from the original shotgun blast to recede before they can begin fine-tuning their work on his face. Facciolo also must undergo therapy to improve his speech.

For now, however, the principal of Sacred Heart School in Redlands is back home, learning how to eat soup. His wife, Suzanne, says he laughs and can move his new jaw around and talk. His mouth hasn't gotten used to its new flooring, constructed of leg flesh, and so he sounds as if he has marbles in his mouth, she says.

Despite the painful incident, he is anxious to return to work. Already, he is handling some administrative tasks for the parochial school in Redlands. When he might set foot again on the school grounds, though, no one knows.

Facciolo's ordeal began on Jan. 23.

He was meeting with two young children when an angry eighth-grader walked into his office with a sawed-off shotgun and, without saying a word, shot away Facciolo's jaw. The 13-year-old, John Sirola Jr., then ran outside and fatally shot himself in the chest. Authorities said they may never know whether the boy committed suicide or shot himself by accident.

Facciolo was rushed to Loma Linda University Medical Center. What the surgeons there found was

surgeon and his team would rebuild Facciolo's face.

The surgery itself is not new. For nearly 20 years surgeons have been rebuilding the jaws of cancer patients and others with bone borrowed from elsewhere in the body, Hendricks said yesterday.

But in the past surgeons have had to use three small pieces of skin because a larger piece could not survive a transplant. Hendricks was proposing to transplant a single large piece of skin using a procedure developed at Loma Linda University and used once before by Hendricks on a patient at Riverside General Hospital. Hendricks is an associate professor of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Loma Linda University.

The next morning at 10 a.m. the long surgery began. Hendricks and his team of doctors and nurses carefully sawed a 12-inch section of bone from Facciolo's left calf, with veins, arteries and a flap of skin the size of a magazine still attached. The bone they took, the fibula, is the smaller of two leg bones in the calf. The fibula is something of a spare, Hendricks said, and its removal will not affect Facciolo's ability to walk.

With veins from the transplant still attached to Facciolo's left leg, surgeons notched the bone twice like a piece of kitchen molding and bent and bolted it into a new jaw. Then they severed the veins to the bone and skin. Without blood, the skin can survive just two hours before it begins to die.

Quickly, Hendricks and his team screwed the new jaw into the remnants of Facciolo's original jaw. The flap of skin was sewn to form the bottom of his mouth and to patch a gap from near his left ear to his throat. Then the arteries and veins from the transplant were stitched into the carotid artery and the jugular vein in Facciolo's neck.

Meanwhile, members of the team cut patch of skin to fit the area on the leg where Facciolo's new jaw had come from. By about 2 a.m. the following morning, the surgery was complete.

Last week Facciolo went home, where his wife and 16-year-old son can care for him for now. Possibly 10 more surgeries lie ahead. The work could take a year or more, Hendricks said.

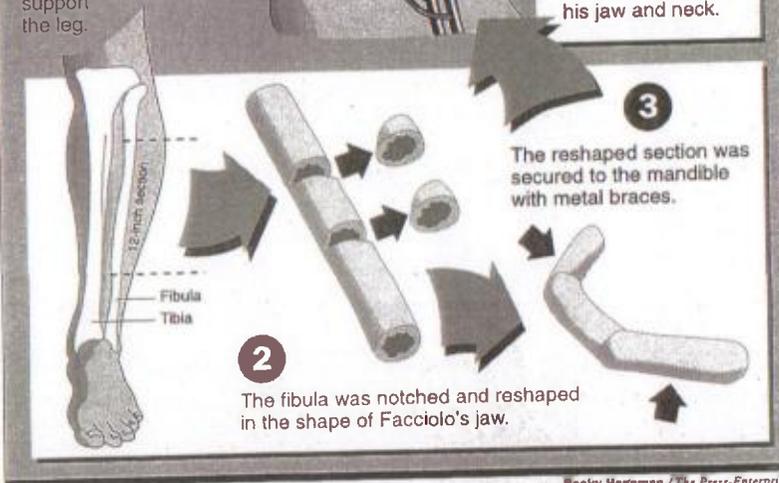
Because the new skin looks dif-

Reconstructing a jaw

When Redlands school principal Richard Facciolo was shot in the face with a shotgun, he lost his lower jaw. Here's how Loma Linda University Medical Center surgeons have reconstructed it.

1

To replace the jaw bone, they removed a 12-inch section of his left fibula, leaving the tibia intact to support the leg.



4

Skin and soft tissue were taken from Facciolo's left calf to replace what was missing from inside his mouth and around his jaw and neck.

3

The reshaped section was secured to the mandible with metal braces.

2

The fibula was notched and reshaped in the shape of Facciolo's jaw.

Bocky Hageman / The Press-Enterprise

work to gradually stretch the existing facial skin across as much of the new patch as possible. Hendricks said perhaps half of the new skin ultimately will be covered over.

work to the teeth on his upper left side that were chipped by the shotgun blast.

But first the swelling in his jaw must recede. Just as important,

makes it difficult to rush the reconstructive surgery that still must be done.

But Facciolo is anxious to begin, Hendricks said. "As Mr. Facciolo told me today, he was ready yester-