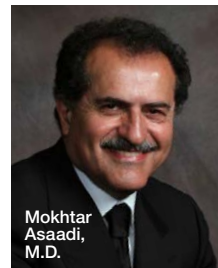


BURN VICTIM'S COMEBACK

AFTER INJURIES THAT COULD HAVE BEEN FATAL, A FIREFIGHTER RECOVERS—IN BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT.

ON JASON FAZIO'S 41ST BIRTHDAY FIVE YEARS AGO, HE NEARLY



Mokhtar Asaadi, M.D.

died. A firefighter serving as acting captain of an Asbury Park Fire Department truck company, Fazio was seriously burned. He beat the medical odds simply to survive, but then faced years of physical pain from the scarring caused by his burns—and equally debilitating emotional pain from the trauma, his injuries and their aftermath.

Today, though, Fazio's life is back on track, thanks to a unique plastic surgeon at Saint Barnabas Medical Center. That doctor—Mokhtar Asaadi, M.D.—not only treats his scarring with an aggressive and unique laser treatment, but also helped Fazio regain the emotional strength to push through injuries that have led others to despair.

Fazio, who turns 46 on January 10, lives in Ocean Township, with his wife, Barbara. He has two children from a previous marriage, Nicholas, 13; and Nathan, 10. On Jan. 10, 2011, his company got a 9 a.m. call to a fire at Bangs Avenue and Main Street in Asbury Park. The building had 12 second-floor apartments over stores. The fire was upstairs, and it was believed—incorrectly—that a woman was trapped in it. Heavy smoke billowed out of the windows. Fazio

went up to look for the woman in a back bedroom when the fire “flashed.” The heat had risen to such a point that the room erupted in an explosion of fire.

“I basically was torched,” says Fazio, who somehow found a window and dove out, fracturing several bones as he landed.

He was hosed down to extinguish the fire and rushed to a nearby hospital, then sent by helicopter to The Burn Center at Saint Barnabas Medical Center, where Dr. Asaadi chairs the Department of Plastic Surgery. It was unclear at first whether Fazio would survive the night.

The mortality rate for people in his condition was about 90 percent. There were third-degree burns over 50 percent of his body, including his face, head, arms and legs.

Fazio was put into a medically induced coma, which he remained in for almost four months, and was given seven skin grafts and a dozen blood transfusions. But he survived. “I am nothing less than a miracle,” he says.

A year after the fire, Fazio still had terrible scars on his face and lips, no hair on his face or scalp and one missing ear, and he could barely move his arms because the scars on them had made them so tight. “You lock up almost like an ape,” he says. “I couldn’t reach for a can on a shelf.” He was emotionally locked up as well, and though



Michael A. Marano, M.D.

» STATE-OF-THE-ART CARE FOR BURNS OF ALL KINDS

The injuries sustained by firefighter Jason Fazio (see main article) were grave, but he did have one thing going for him: He was treated at one of the nation’s finest facilities of its kind.

The Burn Center at Saint Barnabas is the only state-certified burn treatment facility in New Jersey and one of North America’s largest. With 12 intensive care beds and a 16-bed step-down unit for less critically injured patients, it provides expert care for patients of all ages.

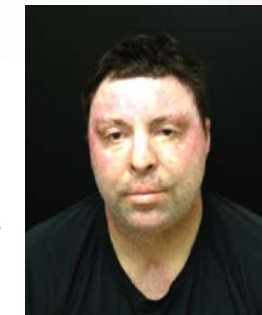
The center offers a full range of specialized services, including a dedicated outpatient department, where individuals with small

or minor burns receive treatment and discharged patients return for follow-up care. Each year, some 325–350 inpatients are treated along with nearly 6,000 outpatients.

Besides burn intensive care and step-down care, the center offers hydrotherapy and rehabilitative services, according to its medical director, Michael A. Marano, M.D. There’s also peer support, so that burn victims can share feelings and coping strategies.

The Burn Center is also committed to lowering the incidence of burn injury throughout the region. Through the Saint Barnabas Burn Foundation, it offers a variety of individualized educational programs aimed at burn prevention and fire safety.

Says Dr. Marano: “Mr. Fazio is an example of the need for a positive attitude and strong motivation to recover from an extreme injury such as a burn. People like Mr. Fazio remind us of why we do this type of work and make us proud of them, and all firefighters, every day.”



Ex-firefighter Jason Fazio has faced a long recovery from disfiguring injuries he sustained in a fire. Treatment has helped improve his appearance—and his outlook.

he was treated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for a while, that treatment had ended. Unable to work, in pain and severely disfigured, Fazio fell into a depression. Dr. Asaadi, who has been treating burn patients for more than 35 years, helped address Fazio’s depression as well as his disfigurements.

First, he fitted Fazio with a hairpiece. “That made me feel good, gave me some positive energy,” Fazio says. Dr. Asaadi also began reconstructive surgery on his ears, nose, lips and chin. And he employed an aggressive technique called aponeurotomy, which he has pioneered in treating burn scars. With it, he cuts into and under the scar tissue with laser light and a sharp needle to release the tight tissue. Then he grafts fat to the scarred area, which helps prevent new scar formation. “This technique has been used for other procedures, but it is new for burns,” says the doctor. “It has never been written up in

the literature, but I have done it many times for burn patients and found it very successful.”

He also fought to get Fazio workers’ compensation coverage for more PTSD treatment. “At first the case manager said no, but Dr. Asaadi stayed with me and forced them to keep me going for therapy,” Fazio says. “He told me to get back to the gym, stay off pain pills and get straight. He gave me back some dignity. My family loves him, and he loves my family. He says, ‘I am so proud of you,’ and I appreciate that.”

Fazio sees Dr. Asaadi once a month for continued aponeurotomy treatment. Since the accident he has remarried, and this past summer he went back to work—as Superintendent of Public Works for the Borough of Deal.

“I never thought I would work again,” says the ex-firefighter. “Dr. Asaadi gave me my life back.”

FOR IMMEDIATE CARE OR CONSULTATION WITH THE BURN CENTER AT SAINT BARNABAS MEDICAL CENTER, PLEASE CALL 973.322.5924 OR VISIT BARNABASHEALTH.ORG/SBMC.

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