

GCC student drops 145 pounds - now wants to spread the word

By Elizabeth Jackman

After being told he was at serious risk of having a heart attack before he was

45, Brandon Van Buskirk began scouring the Internet for information on weight loss.

"I have always been overweight for as long as I can remember," Van Buskirk said. "When I was a freshman in high school, I weighed 270 pounds."

His search finally led him to Dr. John DeBarros and the Weight Loss Institute of Arizona.

"I looked at a lot of stuff. Gastric by-pass surgery scared the crap out of me," Van Buskirk said.

He learned about the lap band procedure, which is far less invasive, and decided to attend one of the WLIA's free seminars to learn more about it.

"Dr. John DeBarros is a great doctor. He was honest and explained everything from the front to the back, he told you how it was - that is how a surgeon should be. He is very good," Van Buskirk said.

At his heaviest about a year-and-a-half ago, Van Buskirk, 25, weighed 355 pounds.

He had the surgery done a year ago on Halloween. Now the six-foot-tall Glendale Community College student is a healthy and fit 220 pounds.

His parents paid for the operation since it was not covered by insurance. The outpatient procedure was done in an afternoon.

"I sprung back fairly quickly. I took my time, I was only laid up for about one week," Van Buskirk said. "They want you to take it easy for a couple of months so you don't pop any internal stitches. After three months, I was back playing ice and roller hockey. I lost about 10 pounds each month."



After his surgery a year ago, GCC student Van Buskirk now weighs 220 pounds.

Now, he says, people often won't recognize him.

"They say, 'You look like someone I used to go to high school with.' Then after two or three minutes, they figure out it's me. I get a lot of compliments, it is nice," Van Buskirk said.

But it wasn't always that way for Van Buskirk, who said he used to be just the "fat kid."

"It was a lot more about my negative self-image and the way I felt about myself rather than what people said," Van Buskirk said. "I didn't want to eat around people because I worried about them judging me, and I hated shopping for clothes."

He said his brother and sister are skinny and he has always exercised and been active.

"I guess I love the way food tastes, I love cooking and food just seemed to stick to me," he said about his struggle with being overweight.

Van Buskirk said he has been off and on diets since he was 16 years old.

"I tried Atkins, weight-loss plans, Phen Phen, and tons of pills like zenodrine and hydroxycut," Van Buskirk said. "They would work a little bit, then I would plateau out at around 280. I would never get below that."

Lap-band was approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) in June 2001.

The trademarked BioEnterics Lap Band Adjustable Gastric Banding System induces weight loss by reducing the capacity of the stomach, which restricts the amount of food that can be consumed.

Since there is no cutting, stapling or stomach routing involved, it is the least traumatic of all weight-loss surgeries. If, for any reason, the lap band needs to be removed, the stomach generally returns to its original form.

"The band can be adjusted through a port by just using a local anesthetic," Van Buskirk said. "I have had mine adjusted twice. When I got down to 210, I had it loosened so I could add about 10 pounds of muscle. I am very happy with my weight now. I am working out a lot, clothes fit looser for the first time. I get up and I don't see that fat person in the mirror."

He has been so affected by the procedure, he changed his major to become a weight-loss surgeon.

"I am going to try and get into pre-med at Midwestern University," Van Buskirk said. "This has very much changed my life. I have the confidence to do a lot of things I didn't believe I could do. It goes into so many other parts of life."

Before, he felt people would talk to him because they felt sorry for him, not because he was an interesting or a good person.

He said his parents and sibling are amazed and very happy for him.

"I finally see the beautiful person they always saw," Van Buskirk said. "I recommend the surgery to people a lot. When people ask me how I lost so much weight, I pass them a card about the procedure I keep in my wallet."

To learn more about Lap-Band, visit the Web site www.weightlossinstituteofaz.com.