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Voice of the National Anthem for Chicago Sports Teams

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Voice of the National Anthem for Chicago Sports Teams

Wayne Messmer's Recovery from a Bullet Wound Profiled in Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

Composers
Locals -
Feature
Entertainment
- Chgo, Cont. off

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--A run-in with an armed youth almost silenced the trademark baritone voice, whose rendition of the Star Spangled Banner thrills fans at Chicago Cubs, White Sox, Bulls, and Blackhawks' games.

Wayne Messmer, a 1972 Illinois Wesleyan University graduate in music education, was shot April 9 on Chicago's West Side. For two weeks, he couldn't speak as he recovered from a gunshot wound that "tickled" his vocal chords.

"Dying was never an option," Messmer told Chris Fusco, a 1994 IWU graduate, who recently interviewed the singer and professional sports team executive for an article appearing in the Winter 1994 edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*. A copy of the article is attached to this news release.

Messmer was shot around 2 a.m. as he was about to start his car. He saw a teenager with a gun approaching him, but never saw a second juvenile, a 15-year-old, who shot him through his car window. Messmer drove a short distance to a bar for help as he used his necktie to stop the bleeding from the bullet. Paramedics took Messmer to Cook County Hospital for treatment.

In "Wayne Messmer Takes Back the Moment: '72 Grad Sings Anthem Again After Recovering from Bullet Wound," Messmer told Fusco:

"Had this happened in a 'good neighborhood,' I guarantee you I would not be doing this interview. I was lucky to receive first-class care from the best trauma unit in the world."

Messmer showed his appreciation by helping Cook County Hospital successfully petition for a new building.

"Everyone," Messmer added, "was so concerned about if I would sing or speak again. For many, I was the surrogate voice of the anthem, and for me to be shot in the throat was considered repulsive and un-American."

Messmer has sung the Star Spangled Banner at Wrigley Field, Chicago

(more)

Wayne Messmer/2

Stadium, and Comisky Park more than 3,000 times for Chicago sports fans.

Messmer told Fusco, who is a reporter for a suburban Chicago newspaper, that he received thousands of cards, letters, and books from all 50 states. Among Messmer's get-well cards was one from IWU students and faculty drawn by Chetna Bhosale, an art major from Peoria who will graduate in May.

On Oct. 14, Messmer sang the national anthem for the first time since being wounded before a crowd of 16,000 at the Rosemont Horizon in suburban Chicago, when the International Hockey League Chicago Wolves opened their home season against the Detroit Vipers. Messmer is executive vice president of the Wolves.

Messmer and his wife, Kathleen, kept separate journals of their family ordeal and plan to publish a book.

"There certainly is a reason why I didn't die in this incident," Messmer told Fusco. "I know it's because I can help spread the word about appreciation of human life, the responsibility of parents to their children, and, as I've said a billion times, the power of prayer."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.