

Openly bearing a dire warning to Phila. youth

After Maurice Young got shot, he tried to hide his scars with his hair, but no matter how he wore it, it never really worked.

One day, he just gave up trying and shaved his head.

“It shows that I’m stronger than what tried to kill me,” he said.

And now he wants to remind others that not everyone is as lucky.

Young’s most prominent scar runs 12 inches, like a seam from his forehead to the nape of his neck.

It’s one of three scars the 26-year-old Philadelphian has from being shot twice in the back of the head. Another, from a stent doctors used to drain fluid from his brain, sticks out prominently on his left side.



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Young was 18 when a neighborhood beef about nothing important nearly killed him. He lay in a coma for three months. Remnants of bullets remain in his skull.

He had to learn how to walk and talk again when he woke up. But even before he was fully recovered, he was hungry for a second chance.

A human services program taught at JEVS career training school, Orleans Technical College, led to a job at the Bridge, a residential program for young people dealing with substance abuse and mental health issues. And then came an inspiration award at JEVS Human Services’ 18th annual Strictly Business Awards for people who have overcome obstacles to meet their personal and career goals.

Like so many of Philadelphia’s young men who cheat death, Young wanted to work with troubled young people in hopes that his mistakes will somehow spare them from theirs.

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I’ve talked to a lot of guys like Young. They all have a story. Young’s is about how a dumb and dangerous attrac-

tion to the streets nearly killed a kid who had it better than most.

Young grew up in Mount Airy with a mother who loved him and worked hard to provide food and a home for her children. Taking drugs led to selling drugs, which led to guns and prison, and nearly death.

His story is about his ongoing road to redemption.

But Young also has those scars, a visible manifestation of mistakes that have much more of an impact than any story, any words of wisdom from an “old head” who’s been there.

Sometimes a kid still trying to prove himself will make fun of the scars — calling Young “bullethead” in an effort to rattle the big guy.

But Young doesn’t rattle. The ribbing only proves to the Germantown man that his scars are making an impression, and hopefully making the kids think.

Alia Sutton-Bey, a human services instructor at Orleans Technical College, said she’s in awe of Young, and not just because he was so dedicated to the program that he routinely showed up to class hours early.

“Whether we accept it or not, people like Maurice have street cred,” she said. “That’s the key: he cannot only say he overcame, he can show he overcame.”

Terrant Morrison, his boss at the Bridge, credits Young’s impact on two things. Part of Young’s success at the Bridge is that he doesn’t blame anyone, Morrison said. “He takes complete ownership of his life, all of it.”

“Factor in his scar and what you have is a real, in living color, wake-up call for these kids,” he said.

James Parks, 18, of West Philly, is one of the awakened.

“You see the scar on his head



and you know he's for real and has lessons to share." Parks, who plans to go to trade school after leaving the Bridge, is taking them all in.

"I think the best lesson he's

taught me is that there's no winning out there," he said.

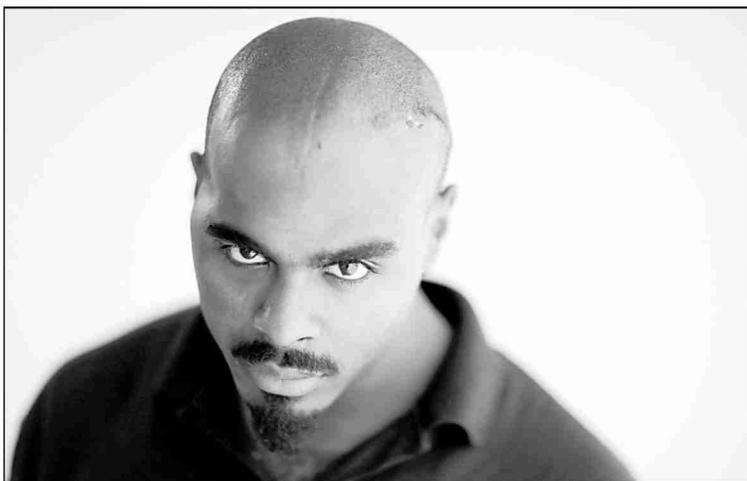
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Maurice Young spots his mentee, James Parks, 18, at the Bridge, a program for youths with substance abuse and mental health issues. After the Bridge, Parks plans on going to trade school. DAVID SWANSON / Staff Photographer



A 12-inch scar runs from the middle of Maurice Young's forehead to the nape of his neck, evidence of where he was shot twice as a teen.