

# Skateboard ban could save lives

**Brenton Cherry**

PAUL Schloeffel only needs one look at his son Max to understand why Cromer High School decided to ban its students from riding skateboards and scooters to school.

On July 4, Max was riding his skateboard home when he was involved in a horrific accident that left him in an induced coma for 13 days.

The 15-year-old from Elanora Heights, who was not wearing a helmet at the time, was riding down Ramsey St in Collaroy when he clipped a pothole and was sent flying head-first into a parked car.

The St Paul's Catholic College student was rushed to Royal North Shore Hospital where he would spend nearly two weeks in intensive care, during which time surgeons removed a large section of his skull to ease the pressure on his brain.

While Max escaped long-term brain damage, it will be more than a year before he is fully healed. Until then he is under 24-hour care, must wear a helmet at all times, and faces 18-months rehabilitation as well as a major operation to replace the missing piece of his skull with a titanium plate.

Earlier this month, Cromer High School, which a number of Max's friends attend, brought in a ban on students riding skateboards and scooters to school.

The school said there had been a number of incidents involving its students and decided to err on the side of safety.

While some parents lamented a shift towards a nanny-state, Max's father Paul

said it was the right move.

"If the school ban on scooters and skateboards only saves one family the unbearable trauma of having their child suffer a brain injury then it has to be a good decision, doesn't it?" he said.

Mr Schloeffel said it had been traumatic. "The first few nights were really touch and go – it was quite harrowing," he said.

"The hardest thing about brain injuries is that they can't tell you much – you have to wait until they wake up to really know how they are. One blink of an eye and your whole life changes."

Max said he knows it could have been much worse and wishes he had heeded his parents' repeated advice to wear a helmet.

"I feel so lucky," he said.

"One hundred per cent I'll be wearing a helmet from now on and I'll be skating on the flat – not so many downhill."

"My mates have already started wearing them (helmets)."

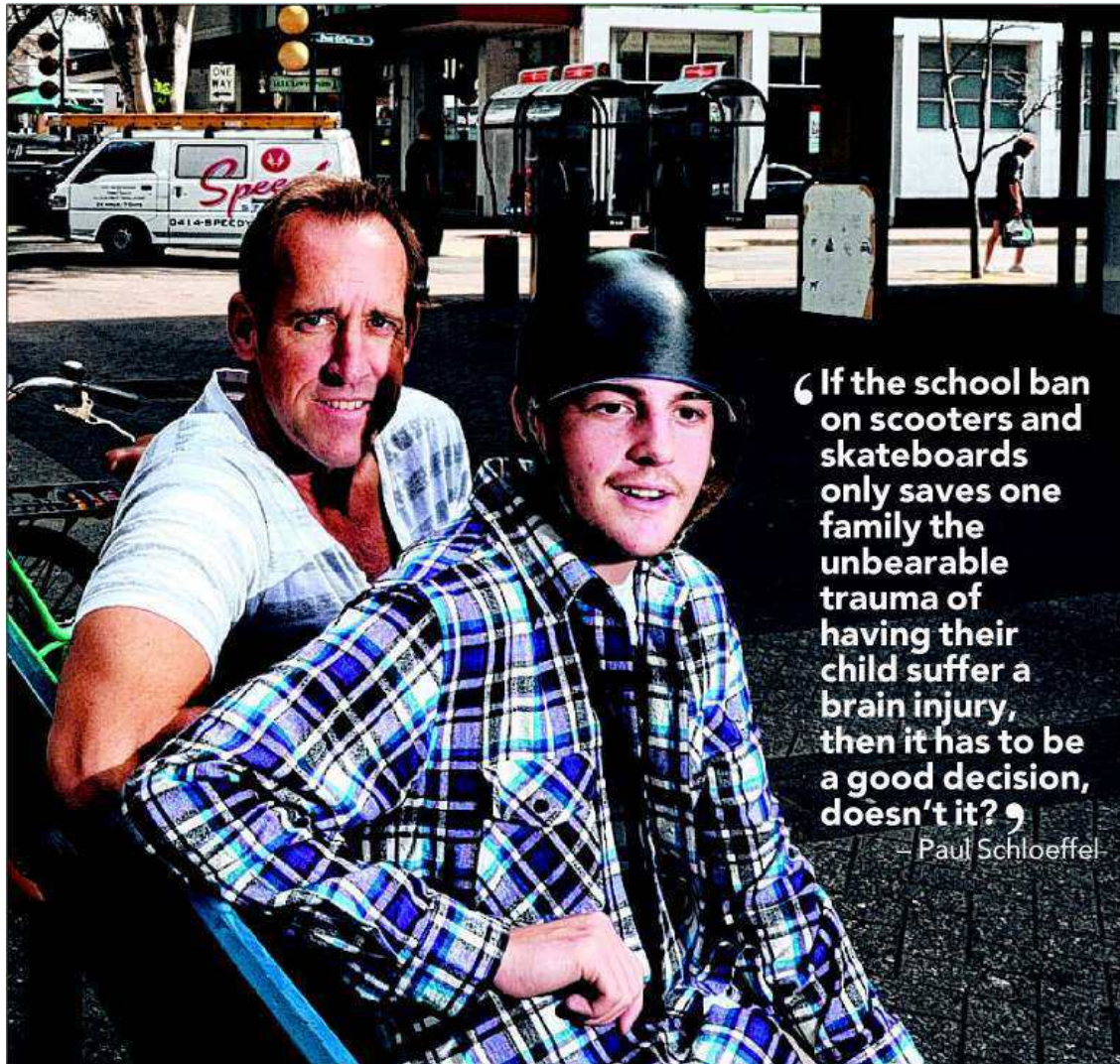
Mr Schloeffel said he hoped Max's story impressed upon people the importance of wearing helmets.

"The guys who were with Max saw him in the ICU and went to pieces and broke down," he said. "Unfortunately you can't show that to everyone, but hopefully we can drive home the message that something like this can happen in the blink of an eye."



## MAX'S LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

- 13 days in an induced coma intensive care at Royal North Shore Hospital
- Two weeks in the brain injury ward
- Three weeks at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde re-learning basic motor skills
- 18 months of further rehabilitation before Max is fully recovered



‘ If the school ban on scooters and skateboards only saves one family the unbearable trauma of having their child suffer a brain injury, then it has to be a good decision, doesn't it? ’

— Paul Schloeffel

Max Schloeffel, in Manly yesterday with his father Paul, is still recovering from a horrific skateboard accident that left him in an induced coma for 13 days.

Picture: VIRGINIA YOUNG