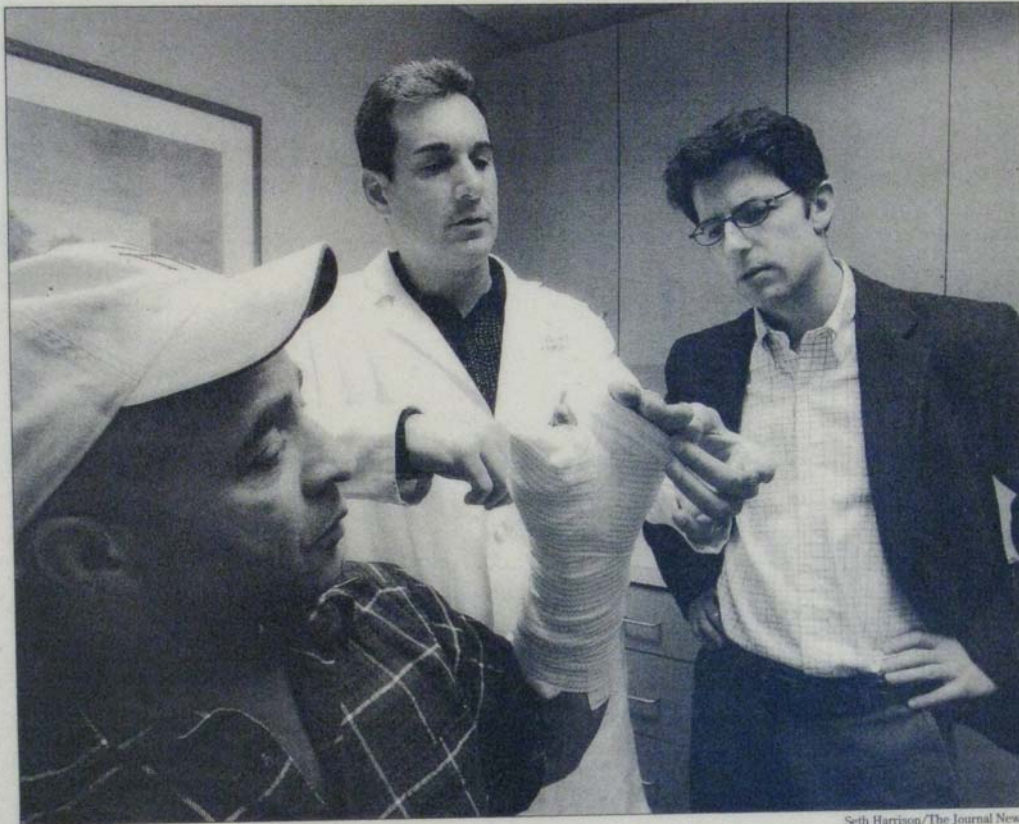


# The Journal News



Seth Harrison/The Journal News

David Gales of Monsey has his hand examined yesterday by Dr. Michael Fiorillo, left, and Dr. Neal Goldberg. The two plastic surgeons reattached Gales' thumb after he accidentally cut it off while installing a floor last week.

## Severed digits a microsurgeon's task

Doctors spread word that local hospitals can do the operation

Jane Lerner  
The Journal News

PEARL RIVER — David Gales was installing a hardwood floor in a house in Nanuet last week when he accidentally sawed off his thumb.

Immediately after the Dec. 15 accident, he picked his severed thumb up from the floor, wrapped it in a tissue and asked his nephew to drive him to Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern.

"I wasn't sure whether or not they could sew it back on," he recalled yesterday. "But I figured that with all the things they can do in the medical field today, anything was possible. Besides, the damage was already done and I

thought I might as well take it with me."

Gale's instinct was correct, said Dr. Michael Fiorillo, a Pearl River plastic surgeon.

He and his partners, Dr. Neal Goldberg and Dr. Hakan Usal, are able to do microsurgery to reattach severed fingers.

The doctors did the surgery in 2002 for the first time in Rockland, when they were able to reattach or "replant" a patient's finger. Since then, they have done the microsurgery a half-dozen times.

Fiorillo and his medical group have been talking to local emergency medical technicians and other emergency workers to make them aware that patients who suffer an accidental finger amputation can be treated in Rockland.

Both Good Samaritan and Nyack Hospital have the necessary microscopes and microsurgical equipment for the surgery.

"Before we started doing it," Fiorillo said, "you have to go to Westchester Medical Center or into the city."

On the day that Gales, a Monsey resident, was putting down a hardwood floor when his saw slipped and cut off his thumb, Goldberg was on call at Good Samaritan Hospital.

When Gales walked into the hospital, he told an emergency room nurse that he had injured his hand. He was told to sit down and wait for a doctor.

"I said, 'Lady, I got my thumb in my pocket. I can't wait,'" he recalled.

Emergency room nurses immediately put his thumb on ice, notified the plastic surgeon and prepared Gales for surgery.

He spent the next seven hours in the operating room.

When reattaching a finger, doctors have to sew together veins, arteries, bone, nerves and tendons.

"The sutures we use are so small they can't be seen with the naked eye," Fiorillo said. "The whole surgery has to be done under a microscope."

Doctors almost always try to reattach a thumb because it is such an important part of the hand, Fiorillo said.

"It's more than 50 percent of the function of the hand," he said. "Without it, your hand is almost useless."

Doctors also used leeches to restore the blood flow to Gales' thumb.

Gales, 51, left the hospital Wednesday, less than a week after the accident. The prognosis for his thumb is good.

"I'm very lucky," he said. "I'm glad the doctors were gutsy enough to try it."

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