A battered green wristband. This clue identified Mike Tanner’s broken, burned body at the hospital he was rushed to after a natural gas explosion rocked Kansas City’s Country Club Plaza Feb. 19.

**Years of disaster response training**
As the region’s only nationally verified Level I Trauma Center and nationally verified burn center, The University of Kansas Hospital quickly mobilized. Trauma and burn teams put their years of disaster response training and preparation to work as blast victims began arriving.

Clinging to life with burns covering 22 percent of his body, Mike was transferred to the hospital from another facility. He was bleeding internally from a ruptured spleen, which had to be removed.

That surgery was the first of 15 surgeries or procedures he would eventually undergo to repair his extensive injuries. Severe burns to his stomach, right hand and both legs were the greatest threat in that first critical month.

**Burn recovery: slow, complex process**
Richard Korentager, MD, chair of plastic surgery and burn, noted burn recovery is a slow, complex process fraught with potential complications.

“Burn patients must regrow skin to cover damaged tissues,” he said. “We really can’t breathe a big sigh of relief until essentially all the wounds are covered. We have to be very vigilant and on guard for potential infections and other things that can set the patient back.” In Mike’s case, diabetes further complicated his recovery.

Mike’s wife, Crystal, praised the entire burn team for his...
Why would you go anywhere else?

outstanding care. “The nurses were just simply amazing. The doctors were informative, answering our questions day after day,” she said.

Mike hit a milestone at three weeks when he moved out of burn intensive care and could see his 8-year-old daughter, Raelyn, for the first time since his accident. His teenage son, Jayden, had already visited.

Preparing to see Dad
“A child psychologist had talked with both kids,” Crystal said, “especially to make sure our daughter was ready, showing her a book with pictures of the machines that explained what they did. But honestly, she didn’t notice. She wanted to see him so bad she just ran in hollering, ‘Daddy! Daddy!’ ”

A family man who never missed his children’s wrestling meets, gymnastics events or baseball games, Mike gets emotional talking about the kids. “It’s really tough not being able to do the things with them I always did;” he said.

Dedicated during rehabilitation
After six weeks, he began inpatient rehabilitation. His personal goal raised eyebrows: Be ready to go home in two weeks – even though he couldn’t stand without assistance at his first session. But Mike achieved his goal.

For burn patients like Mike, recovery is measured in months and years. After in-home rehabilitation, he started outpatient rehabilitation to rebuild his strength and stamina and address restricted movement in his left arm caused by nerve damage. He still goes to rehab sessions three times a week.

The Tanners recognize Mike still has a long journey ahead, physically and emotionally. “I’ve been a fighter all my life,” he said quietly. “I’m trying to do the best I can for my family every day.”

His wristband that survived the explosion? From his son’s high school wrestling team, it reads: FINISH STRONG. Mike intends to do just that.

For more information, visit kumc.com/burncare.

Nationally verified burn center provides highest level of care

The University of Kansas Hospital’s Burnett Burn Center was one of the country’s first to receive American Burn Association verification.

One of just 62 U.S. burn centers verified by the ABA and the American College of Surgeons, it recently received verification as a pediatric burn center. Earning national verification means a burn center meets rigorous standards and is staffed, trained and equipped to treat the most critical burn injuries.

Serving the community for 40 years
Established 40 years ago with a gift from Gene and Barbara Burnett, the burn center cares for about 350 patients each year. “The program’s survival rates are among the best in the nation,” said Dhaval Bhavsar, MD,omedical director with James Howard, MD.

The burn center’s multidisciplinary team includes plastic surgeons and intensive care physicians, nurses and therapists in critical care, infection, metabolism, nutrition, wound care, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Patient care is provided around the clock by burn specialists. No other burn center in the country provides a higher level of care.

Center provides ongoing support
Outpatient Burn and Wound Care, the Burn Survivor Support Group and burn wellness programs offer patients continuity of care for years after their injuries.

To make a gift to the Burnett Burn Center, call 913-588-2800 or visit kumc.com/giving.