

## ***Blinded Officer Regains Full Vision, Credits Hyperbaric Chamber***

**By MICHAEL A.W. OTTEY**  
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PEMBROKE PINES -- When lightning strikes and thunder roars, fear grows in the heart of Carlos Torres Jr.

The Miami-Dade County police officer, a resident of Pembroke Pines, was struck by lightning in July while he worked in his nursery. It left him blind.

After months of blindness, Torres said he had regained his sight in early December. He credited his recovery to hours spent in an oxygen chamber at the Ocean Hyperbaric Neurologic Center in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea.

Hyperbaric oxygenation, considered a treatment of last resort, has not been fully embraced by the larger medical community. Many doctors say its success remains unproven, while some health insurers refuse to pay for the treatment.

But Torres, 41, met with reporters at the center to say he's living proof the treatment works. He regained full vision Dec. 6, he said, and now has perfect vision in his right eye and better than perfect in the left.

"I came here with no vision," he said, standing next to one of the 12 oxygen chambers. "I started regaining my vision 10 minutes into my 53rd treatment."

For one hour a day, Torres lay in the oxygen tank. He has had 72 treatments. He began to see silhouettes, then colors on his 53rd treatment, with his vision gradually improving.

Torres began the hyperbaric oxygenation treatments a month after he was hit by lightning.

Dr. Richard A. Neubauer, medical director of the hyperbaric center, learned about Torres through news reports.

Neubauer said he thought Torres would be a good candidate for the treatment, even after eye doctors told Torres there was no hope of ever regaining his sight.

"We did a functional brain scan, and what we found was areas of his brain were not receiving oxygen," Neubauer said. "He was therefore an excellent candidate."

Neubauer said it was a very emotional day when Torres' sight returned.

"We had hoped and prayed it would work," he said. "He will require no further treatments. He's over the hump."