



ON THE MEND: Thanks to plastic surgeon Murray Beagley, Liam McDonnell, 4, is recovering after being run over by a ride-on mower. PICTURE / AMOS CH

Mower victims' limbs spared

SURGERY: Amputations avoided as doctors graft chest muscles on to boys' legs

by Rebecca Walsh
health reporter

Two little boys who suffered horrific leg injuries after falling under ride-on lawn mowers may have little hope of running round at the beach before Christmas but are recovering well after surgeons saved their damaged limbs.

Liam McDonnell, 4, and Matthew Boersen, 3, each faced the prospect of having part of a leg amputated after losing large amounts of skin and muscle in the accidents, which happened within weeks of each other.

at Middlemore to perform an intricate operation to rebuild their legs using a muscle from their chests.

But the accidents have prompted calls for people to be careful with ride-on mowers, and the boys' parents hope the publicity will prevent more children being injured.

Julianne McDonnell said her son's right leg had been torn to "ribbons" and the bones shattered.

"I just thought his leg was gone. When the doctors said, 'We will save it', I couldn't believe it, having seen the injury in the first place."

A week ago, Mrs McDonnell was getting dinner ready as Liam and

which merges with the McDonnells' property at Cooks Beach in the Coromandel.

"The chap goes forwards then backwards on the lawn. Liam [ran] behind him as he was going backwards. It's just an accident but [still] pretty horrible."

Weeks earlier, Matthew Boersen was playing on the trampoline at his family's dairy farm at Matatoki in Thames when he fell off, into the path of a ride-on mower driven by his older sister.

Matthew lost part of the heel bone, muscle and skin from his left leg.

For plastic surgeon Murray Beagley, who deals with numerous mower injuries, particularly in spring, the injuries were the worst he had seen

In each case, the latissimus muscle was removed from chest, along with its artery vein, and reattached to the leg. grafts were placed over the mu

Mr Beagley said the surgery using microscopes, was delicate acting work as the artery and measured about 1.5mm in diam

He believed both boys would hardly notice the loss of their muscle as other muscles in shoulder area would compensate for it.

"Because they are young are more likely to adapt to a near-normally functioning shoulder, say, than someone who is years old."

Matthew, who heads home week, could be running round two or three months but Liam f