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Penn State Delco: We're Ready, Willing and Disabled

By Sharon Achilles & Daniel Delaney
Lion's Eye staff writers
saa192 & drd5002 both @psu.edu

Steven Kane (Soph./Comm) slowly makes his way up one of the walkways leading towards the Commons Building here on campus.

He knows to put his body forward and watch out for cracks. Going over cracks too quickly can be dangerous. It is not funny, but hitting the slightest crack the wrong way can send a student in a wheelchair flying. At Penn State Delaware County, where all the students are zooming on foot from building to building, it can be slow going up the campus' few steep hills when you have a place to be.

Interestingly enough, however, Steven Kane can walk. He is one of the students participating in Disability Awareness Day, held here on campus last Thursday.

The event was coordinated by the Senator for Students with Disabilities, Laura Burns (Senior, Edu), alongside Professor Sharon Manco, who is an education instructor on campus.

Last year's Disability Awareness Day had students utilize wheelchairs all day, with near disastrous results as vandals destroyed one of the rented wheelchairs.

The idea, in the past, was to have students spend their day in a wheelchair. This year other disabilities were given more attention, while providing opportunities for more student participation.

Specialists on loss of sight, loss of hearing, and learning disabilities were manning booths along the pathway that leads from the parking lot to the Commons building. They offered reading material and their own personal stories to students.

Students were able to participate by interacting with activities that would allow them greater insight on what it feels like to be disabled. Visitors from the Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) came to Delco to support the event and let students know more about what it feels like to be visually impaired.

Jen Wilgus, a volunteer with the Center's programs, encouraged Delco students to blindfold themselves and attempt to spread peanut butter on crackers. This exercise let SGA Vice President, Crystal Bowhall (Junior/Business Administration), and Burns experience a part of Jen's everyday routine.

"If I didn't have the peanut butter right in front of me, this would be impossible!" said Bowhall. Burns frantically added, "Where did my other cracker go?"

CBVI representatives Candy Bantum and Joseph McCloskey brought special tools that help those with sight disabilities get through their daily



photos by Dan Delaney and Sharon Achilles

rouines. For example, McCloskey displayed a calculator that announces which key has been tapped during use and a magnifying glass that attaches to the end of a pen. This allows the writer to better see and write his or her signature.

Whether you realize it or not, American Sign Language (ASL) is the third most used language in the United States. There are even students and faculty on campus who use it inside and outside of the classroom.

Jackie DeSalvo (Senior/Media Studies) personally taught students how to sign out their names. She was helping out at the hearing loss demonstration booth along with Prof. Manco.

"Some students on campus lip-read," said Manco noting that not all hearing disabilities are extreme.

To simulate what it's like for those with all levels of hearing loss, she used a recording that played a song at different volumes,

corresponding to the severity of the person's disability. The recording also explained how hearing loss can also occur on specific frequencies, disallowing certain sounds, not just lowering the volume.

The wheelchair races was one of the more popular events of the day. This year, as in years past, Shea (Senior/Comm) has been an integral part with coordinating Disability Awareness Day events. Spina bifida has caused her to use a wheelchair everyday. She sat on the sidelines cheering for students who took the wheelchair race challenge.

Steven Kane, the winner of one of the races, talked about his experience. "It was a good exercise. I'm glad someone was behind me," referring to SGA President, Stacy Mann (Senior/Business), "The steering was more difficult than I thought," he said.

To aid those with spina bifida who were affected by hurricane Katrina, Shea was taking monetary donations that will be used to buy medical supplies.

At the same booth, Chris Coia, of Student Life started his new campus initiative called "The Wheel."

This program's goal is to get more students to come Delco events by using a raffle to win a free iPod Nano at the end of the semester.

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