

Having to overcome obstacles, PSU/WB student bounces back

By REBECCA BRIA
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November 8, 2004 is a day Shawnee Acker will never forget. Acker was lying on the backseat of a car on her way back to college at Penn State Schuylkill when the driver fell asleep at the wheel. Each time the car rolled on Interstate 81 near the Interstate 80 junction, Acker's body was thrown up against it. Having been ejected from the vehicle, the 21-year-old was flown to Lehigh Valley Hospital where she was placed in the Intensive Care Unit.

Now three-and-a-half years later, Acker, 25, of Moscow, is the recipient of the 2008 Outstanding Adult Learner Award at Penn State Wilkes-Barre. The award is given to one adult from each of the five institutions of higher learning in the county and is an annual collaborative sponsorship among the colleges.

Acker received a plaque honoring her as Penn State Wilkes-Barre's 2008 Outstanding Adult Learner at a dinner ceremony hosted by Misericordia University.

"I was really surprised because a lot of people who get it (the

award) are very accomplished in their school," Acker said. "It's a big honor. The people who got it have been through a lot and done a lot."

"When I was hurt, I decided to finish school," Acker said. "I didn't want to just lie around and do nothing every day."

But Acker is lucky to even be alive. She was in the hospital for six weeks before being transferred to Moses Taylor Skilled Nursing Home in Scranton. Upon her release from the hospital, she lived with her parents for several months to heal. She later underwent orthopedic surgery at Hershey Medical Center where she spent another month.

"It definitely made me appreciate my family and my friends more because everybody was there for me when I needed them," Acker said of the experience. "I just appreciate everything more."

Acker used a wheelchair for two years and had to learn to walk all over again. While rehabilitating, she decided to enroll in online courses from Penn State University.

"A lot of my courses at Penn State I had to cancel when I got

hurt," she said. "I didn't want to fall too far behind, so I started taking courses."

After being discharged from Hershey Medical Center, Acker enrolled at Penn State Wilkes-Barre because the Penn State Worthington campus, which is closer to her hometown, does not offer her major. While at the university, she has maintained a 3.0 cumulative grade point average and, through the school, has performed volunteer work at St. Francis of Assisi Soup Kitchen in Scranton and St. Mary's Villa Nursing Home in Moscow. She is a member of the honor society club at Penn State.

Last fall, Acker and her room-

mate, Maggie Norton, started the Local Environmental Revolution Club. Acker serves as president of the club which is aimed at performing environmental projects and cleanups in the community. Also in the fall semester of 2007, she completed an internship with the United States Probation Office for the Middle States of Pennsylvania, where she worked in Wilkes-Barre and Scranton.

This Saturday, Acker will graduate with a bachelor's degree in Administration of Justice from Penn State Wilkes-Barre. She plans to seek employment in probation or parole and hopes to return to school for her master's degree.



Shawnee Acker, 25, of Moscow, is the recipient of the 2008 Adult Learner Award at Penn State Wilkes-Barre. The award is given to one adult from each of the five institutions of higher learning in the county and is an annual collaborative sponsorship among the colleges. Acker survived an automobile accident that forced her to use a wheelchair and learn to walk again.

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