

Ex-prez rolls for disabled dignity

BY CARL GETTO

Life as a quadriplegic motivated former Dalhousie Student Union President Dave Shannon (1989-1990) to bungee jump in a wheelchair. Now he is preparing for a plunge of a different kind: rolling across Canada on a cross-country wheelchair tour.

"When you're bungee jumping in a wheelchair with a rope tied around your waist, you don't simply drop straight down; instead what happens is that because of the weight of the chair you tumble in circles as you're falling through the air," said Shannon.

Recently Shannon came to Halifax to promote the Dave Shannon Cross Canada Tour which begins April 1st in St. John's, Newfoundland and concludes September 23rd in Victoria, B.C. Interestingly, the day the tour ends will be the 15th anniversary of Shannon's accident; a spinal injury received during a Canada

Games Rugby competition held in Nova Scotia a few days after his 18th birthday.

Billed as "a journey promoting dignity opportunity and outcome for persons with disabilities," the tour aims to raise money to assist disabled people through scholarships, small business loans and lobbying for improved public policies.

"Education and awareness is the main focus of what we hope to accomplish," said Shannon. "During the past 15 years, I've seen, among the public, an increase in awareness of disability issues. Back a dozen years ago ramps were the big issue; today access to new technology is the major concern."

Shannon, during his tour, hopes to average 15 kilometres an hour as he wheels by 100 kilometres of the country each day. He will be using an enhanced wheelchair designed to have a wider wheelbase and state of the art batteries. These special fea-

tures will assist him by reducing the amount of physical effort required to move the wheelchair.

To be in shape for the physical requirements of the trip, Shannon said, "I've been on an exercise program designed by the Kinesiology department at Lakehead University which involves subjecting my neck and back muscles to physical demands similar to what they'll experience on the road."

Despite damaging his spine in the rugby accident, Shannon's interest in the sport remains keen. He will host a rugby tournament as part of his tour. In addition, he will be putting on a one-man theatrical performance at many of his stops. The play, comprised of prose and poetic readings, will focus on the feelings a person experiences in the various relationships in his/her life.

"The thrust of what I am doing is to further dignity issues," said Shannon. "By dignity issues I mean heightened employability of disabled people to be independ-

ent so that independent living can be a real goal, allowing disabled people to be independent members of the community."

Shannon credits his friends for the support that helped him adapt to life in a wheelchair.

"Of all the influences which helped me after my accident, I value the support of my friends," he said. "In particular, maintaining the friendship of those who knew me before the accident was crucial because this prevented my self-perception from becoming distorted. If the attitudes of my friends toward me had changed after the accident than my self-perception would have taken a major tumble."

"We're now getting to where we're finalizing many aspects of

our tour and one of the reasons I've returned to the SUB is to invite any Dal student who would like to volunteer to help out on the tour to pick up an application at the DSU office. Students from any part of the country can give assistance from their home town or travel with us for any part of the tour."

Carman Barteaux and Andrea Smith will be coordinating the DSU's relationship with Dave Shannon and can answer questions about volunteering for the tour. They can be reached at the DSU Council Office in room 222 of the Student Union Building or at 494-1281. Andrea and Carman are keen about getting volunteers who have varied interests and skills.

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