Life’s A Stage for Comic
By Rachel Carter

Roaring laughter. A round of applause. Beading sweat. Spotlights heating up the stage. All of these things are a reality for Graham Dixon every time he gets on stage to perform a comedy act in front of an energized audience. Dixon quickly and easily engages the audience with his confidence and punch lines. He gets his material from different aspects of his everyday life. His most used material? His disability.

In July 2002, Dixon was in a motorcycle accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down just weeks after he graduated from high school. When he was told he had a complete T5 spinal cord injury, Dixon knew his life would change drastically. Despite the major lifestyle changes he knew he would have to make, he still faced the situation with positivity. He explained, “I tried to focus less on what was lost and more on what I still had left.”

Dixon went on to graduate from the University of South Carolina with a degree in Mass Communications Broadcast Journalism, though he found that he didn’t want to do a typical broadcasting job. “The way I see it, if you are prepared to do broadcast journalism, then you are prepared to broadcast any type of media in a high-intensity environment,” Dixon said. The skills he learned in getting his degree prepared him to do what he loves doing today: standup comedy. His interest in comedy was brought on by a visit to an open-mike night at the Comedy House in Columbia and it evolved from there. Now when he’s not working his day job, he is doing shows in clubs as far away as Florida and New York.

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Shortly after graduating, Dixon learned about the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department and the services provided to South Carolinians with disabilities. He became a VR client. Continued on Page 2.
and was soon exercising regularly at the Muscular Development Center on VR’s West Columbia campus. Most of the time, he can be found using the Easy Stand Glider, or, as employees refer to it, “Graham’s Man Cave.”

About a year later, a physical therapist assistant position opened up at VR and was offered to Dixon. Without hesitation, he eagerly accepted. Ever since, Dixon’s role at Vocational Rehabilitation has been evolving. On Mondays through Fridays he can be found all over the West Columbia campus doing team-building activities, teaching classes and filling in gaps wherever he is needed.

Despite paralysis, Dixon has accomplished more than most could only dream of. In addition to his comedy routines, he has also done freelance work as a motivational speaker, life coach, journalist, actor, artist and producer. Since his accident, he’s also pursued a range of recreational activities that aren’t for the faint of heart, including sky diving and bungee jumping.

Energetic, optimistic and hard working, Dixon has been successful in his numerous endeavors because he doesn’t believe that boundaries are there to stop him. He just sees them as another challenge to overcome. The way he sees it, “The only limitations are the ones you set for yourself. If you truly believe you can accomplish something, you can.”

Rachel Carter is a journalism student at the University of South Carolina who was formerly employed with the association.
Ask Janet Anderson about getting behind the wheel again after her spinal cord injury and a huge smile lights up her face. “Driving opened the door for me to be independent in many, many ways,” she said, recalling how much it meant to be able to take her 12-year-old daughter to school again.

Six months after a T-8 injury, the Simpsonville resident started the Driver Rehabilitation Program at Roger C. Peace Rehabilitation Hospital in Greenville. After receiving the required referral from her physician, Anderson’s first step was an evaluation by an occupational therapist. The intensive, two-hour evaluation assessed everything from her physical and cognitive abilities to her vision and ability to do transfers. *(The program at Roger C. Peace requires individuals to be able to transfer into a car independently.)*

Then Anderson’s driving skills were evaluated in a car outfitted with dual controls for the instructor and hand controls for her use. “We use the evaluations to formulate ideas on the specific type of adaptive equipment needed,” said Leah Belle, Driver Rehabilitation Coordinator at Roger C. Peace. For an individual with a spinal cord injury, Belle noted, “It really depends on the person and their muscle strength, coordination, and grip which of the various types of hand controls we recommend to meet their particular situation.”

Before Anderson began any training, she knew exactly what she was facing: not just on the road but in what it would cost her to drive after a spinal cord injury. “Prior to someone coming in, I talk to them about the expenses they are looking at so they get a clear picture of the financial burden of driving,” Belle said. While the OT evaluation is generally covered by insurance, driving lessons with a Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist are not. In some instances this cost may be covered by an outside source, such as workers’ compensation or Vocational Rehabilitation, but in many cases it’s an out-of-pocket expense. Anderson was informed that training would be billed at $120 an hour, and that she could expect the process to take somewhere around ten hours.

Anderson also knew that the SUV she drove before her injury wasn’t going to work for her as a wheelchair user. “We tell people that if they are planning on purchasing a vehicle, not to buy anything yet. Our assessment will help them figure out what vehicle best fits their specific needs,” said Belle. In talking with Belle, Anderson also learned that hand controls would cost her somewhere in the neighborhood of $1,500. *Continued on Page 4.*
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Armed with realistic expectations of what lay ahead of her, Anderson dove into training with Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist Natalie Drouin. After becoming comfortable with hand controls on a driving simulator at the hospital, she took to the streets of Greenville in the hospital’s training car. Drouin, who has worked with clients with various disabilities over the years, explained, “With driving after spinal cord injury, people have to relearn the automatic responses they’ve relied on since they are no longer driving with their hands and feet.” For Anderson, the transition proved to be a smooth one, with her completing training after only five hours of behind-the-wheel instruction.

When she passed her driving test at the DMV, Anderson wasn’t the only one smiling. “To be able to see someone like Janet, who has had her world turned upside down, to get back to the things she wants to do, is very, very rewarding,” said Drouin.

For a list of driving rehabilitation programs available to South Carolinians with spinal cord injuries and options for individuals who cannot transfer independently: scspinalcord.org/transportation or call the association.
Health Promotion Study

Live in the Columbia or Charleston area? Participants are being sought for a research study of a health promotion program to help prevent pressure ulcers and urinary tract infections after spinal cord injury.

Contact the association for more information.
(803) 252-2198 or email: info@scspinalcord.org

Research in South Carolina

Through a partnership with the South Carolina Spinal Cord Injury Research Fund based at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, the association keeps up with a wide range studies being conducted in South Carolina. These include assessments on quality of life after spinal cord injury, clinical studies on the effectiveness of specific therapies, and basic science research looking at possible repair after injury.

The association also promotes opportunities for participation in research studies being conducted in the state. Want to be included on a list to be contacted for possible inclusion in a future study?

Check out the South Carolina Spinal Cord Injury Research Fund tab at scspinalcord.org or call 803-252-2198.

Peer Visitor Program

We are firm believers in peer support. That's why we offer one-on-one visits by volunteers who have successfully been living with spinal cord injuries. Their personal experiences put them in a unique position to offer support, motivation, and a listening ear. While this service used to be offered solely to individuals who had been injured within the last 12 months, our newly renamed Peer Visitor Program is now open to anyone who could benefit from such a visit.

Want to request a visit? Or interested in being trained to become a Peer Visitor? Inquire today.
**WIND Conference Scheduled**

While May 10, 2014 may seem like a long time away, the WIND planning committee has been busy at work for months already planning for our second conference for individuals with spinal cord injuries. This year's lineup of sessions is full of interesting options.

*Here’s a sampling:*

- Try out a yoga class with an instructor who runs a yoga class in Columbia for individuals with disabilities.
- Meet a physician who works with holistic medicine and learn how self-hypnosis can be an option for managing chronic pain.
- Find out practical tips to keep your wheelchair in optimal working order.

More information will be sent out as the date approaches.

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**Introducing: Stonemark Station**

Are you a crafter or artist?

Do you provide a service on a freelance basis?

Do you own a restaurant or store?

Do you sell products through home demonstration parties?

Stonemark Station is the South Carolina Spinal Cord Injury Association’s new program to promote business enterprises of self-employed individuals with spinal cord injuries. Whether someone sells products, makes crafts, owns a store or restaurant, or provides a service on a freelance basis, their business can be listed free-of-charge on the association’s website.

For more details and to fill out an application: scspinalcord.org/home-school-work/Stonemark-Station or call 803-252-2198.

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**Supporting the Association**

Ask a family member or friend to honor a special occasion with a donation to support the ongoing work of the association. Donations can be made online at scpsinalcord.org.