

KEISER UNIVERSITY

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Marathon Runner with Cerebral Palsy Inspires Allied Health and Sports Medicine Students in Port St. Lucie

Port St. Lucie, FL—July 8, 2008--The students, faculty, and staff of Keiser University's Port St. Lucie campus enjoyed a rare experience today when marathon runner Gary Oakley, 57, visited. He is currently training for the New York City marathon and has already completed four previous marathons and countless other road races at distances from 5k's to half-marathons.

"He (Oakley) is inspiring, entertaining, and very driven to achieve what others won't even dare to dream," stated Julie Snyder, Sports Medicine and Fitness Technology Program Director. His drive comes from doing what others say can't be done – being a marathon runner with cerebral palsy, she added.

Cerebral palsy is a neurological disorder that affects body movement and muscle coordination. Oakley explained that his legs go considerably slower than his mind would like. Despite this, Oakley has devoted his life to becoming the best he can be and defying perceptions of what he should or should not be able to do.

His parents taught him early to never place limits on himself, even when he had to wear braces on his legs or undergo surgery's to correct alignment issues.

Their attitude to him was, "learn to take care of yourself because we won't be around forever, and you can't support yourself by digging ditches," said Oakley. Though his mother is deceased, his parents to this day remain his greatest sense of motivation through all the unconditional support they gave him throughout his life.

Regarding what messages the students learned from Oakley, Snyder said, "What we learned from hearing his story is that it is truly only the mind that prohibits us from doing things in life and if we give life our best effort, than things beyond our comprehension can be achieved."

Oakley now feels that it is his turn to give back to all those that have helped him in his journey and has started the "Gary Oakley Gaining Forward Momentum Foundation" to help promote projects and provide the necessary resources to others who wish to embrace health and fitness that may have physical challenges as well.

Keiser University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools since 1991 and serves more than 12,000 students at its 13 campuses throughout Florida.

Keiser University offers master's, bachelor's and associate degrees in high demand career fields meeting workforce and economic development needs in the communities we serve. In 2007, Keiser University was the nationwide leader in production of Associate of Science graduates in Health Professions and Related Sciences for the third straight year. (Community College Week Analysis of US Department of Education Data Released June 16, 2008)

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