

Olympian

Handicapped South Jersey Athlete Wins Wheaties Search for Champions Contest

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Special to The Press

Doug Heir, the South Jersey man who won four medals for the United States in the World Wheelchair Olympic Games held in England this summer, will have his photograph on millions of Wheaties cereal boxes this year.

Heir, who lives in Cherry Hill, was one of six winners in the "Wheaties Search for Champions" contest. He was chosen by Wheaties on the basis of sports and community involvement and personal achievement.

Heir now belongs to the Wheaties Hall of Fame Family which includes President Reagan, Jack Armstrong, Babe Ruth, Henry Aaron and Peggy Fleming. Over the last 52 years, the Wheaties Hall of Fame has named only 72 people to its "family."

Heir was flown to Los Angeles where he was photographed by the cereal company.

"It was a real experience having 10 TV cameras watching me eat a bowl of cereal," he said. He was also filmed for Entertainment Tonight, the ESPN Cable Network and CBS news; he was also a guest on Los Angeles radio talk shows.

During the fiercely competitive Wheelchair Olympics, Heir won gold medals in the discus, javelin and shot put competitions, demonstrating his superb athletic conditioning by breaking a 38-year-old record in the discus, tying his own world record in the javelin, and setting a new world record in the shot put. Two thousand athletes from 60 countries participated in the games.

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"It was a great honor to represent the United States," Heir said. "When I was given the gold medal, the national anthem was playing and I saw our flag flying; it was one of the happiest moments of my life," Heir said.

Heir, 24, lost the use of his legs six years ago when he broke his neck attempting to save a drowning child.

"I went through all the stages: first, denial; then I thought 'why me.?' After that I was terribly depressed. I said I couldn't deal with it and I considered suicide. Finally, I decided to deal with it," he said.

Heir works out three times a week and lifts 370 pounds. His

dad and his brother are his coach and trainer. Together they developed a special training program. The program, called "Heir Enomics," is geared toward maximum physical development in the shortest amount of time for both the disabled and the non-disabled.

Aside from his athletic accomplishments, Heir soon will be graduating from Rutgers Law School and hopes to practice law in the southern New Jersey area.

He has worked as a law clerk at the firm of Daniel B. Zonies and Associates; he has also worked for Superior Court Judge Isaiah Steinberg.

He is a legal advocate for Dial Inc. and works on behalf of the disabled and senior citizens.

Heir has collected his share of area honors. The state of New Jersey passed a Senate resolution publicly congratulating him for his outstanding performance at the International Games. The Garden State Rotary Club named him the 1985 Man of the Year, and he has received a commendation from the mayor of Cherry Hill.

In a letter, Gov. Thomas Kean wrote: "I know I speak for the entire state when I say that I am extremely proud of all your accomplishments and of the fact that New Jersey was so highly represented in this year's World Wheelchair Olympics."

Heir is confident he and other handicapped persons can lead full, productive lives.

"Keep in close touch with your inner self," he advises. "Be your own best friend, because when you like yourself, you can accomplish a lot."