AdAPToverCome

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Cooper is still active with Paralympics. in 2008, he served as an adviser for the u.S. Paralympic team. and you may have seen him last year while you were eating breakfast; he was featured on a Cheerios cereal box in recognition for his achievements.

his professional career is just as impressive. he is the founding director and senior research career scientist of the Veteran’s affairs (V a) rehabilitation research and development Center of Excellence in Pittsburgh. Cooper splits these duties with being a distinguished professor at the university of Pittsburgh, focusing his research on physical medicine, rehabilitation engineering and orthopedics.

Cooper has published more than 225 peer-reviewed journal articles and two books, “Wheelchair Selection and Configuration, ” and “rehabilitation Engineering applied to Mobility and Manipulation, ” both of which have been translated into Japanese and Chinese. Cooper latest work, “Care of the Combat amputee, ” was just released. he co-edited the volume with Col. Paul f . Pasquina of the Walter reed army Medical Center.

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in remarks to the u.S. house of representatives last year, late Congressman John Murtha called Cooper “an inspiration. ” and Cooper’s journey started at Cal Poly: studying in the labs, organizing wheelchair racing events on campus, working on the rose float and the human Powered Vehicle.

a San luis obispo native, Cooper misses his hometown and the university nestled against its mountains. he had a chance to visit recently, though, when he served as the guest of honor and speaker for the 2010 Electrical Engineering department Banquet on May 14.

“it’s a spectacular learning environment; it really is a special place, ” he said. “it supported me when i strove to be forward-thinking and move on with my life. ” accordingly.

Cooper was just 20 when he was hit by truck while cycling. The accident happened in germany, where he was stationed in the u.S. army.

his spinal cord was severely injured, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. “The most challenging part of the recovery process was adapting to a new perception of myself – it takes longer to adapt emotionally, ” Cooper said. “The goal of my education at Cal Poly and athletics kept me going. ”

Cooper started with wheelchair basketball at Cal Poly, then moved on to wheelchair racing, building the racing chairs himself in the labs of the College of Engineering and his parents’ automotive machine shop. State and national competitions followed.
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