

Wheelchair athlete killed on Cooper

Police investigating accident cause

by Anne Tobolka

SHORTHORN STAFF

A UTA graduate student was struck and killed Tuesday night in a pedestrian-automobile accident as he attempted to cross Cooper Street at West Second Street.

Andrew David Beck, 35, was crossing the street in his wheelchair at approximately 6:30 p.m. Andy, as his friends knew him, was a quadriplegic.

According to UTA Police Chief Wayne Gay, Beck's wheelchair was hit by a 1986 Chrysler Laser. The 18-year-old driver remained on the accident scene until police arrived. She is not a UTA student.

Beck was taken by ambulance to Arlington Memorial Hospital where he under-

went surgery for extensive internal injuries. He slipped into unconsciousness shortly after arrival at the hospital and never awakened. Beck died at 5 a.m. Wednesday.

Gay said the driver was heading south on Cooper in "fairly heavy traffic." Beck was going west toward the Fine Arts Building.

"He was almost finished crossing when she hit his wheelchair with her front bumper," Gay said. "We are investigating. We have three witnesses, and we have impounded the wheelchair."

He said fault has not been determined but that the driver was not exceeding the posted speed limit.

Shirley Szczesniak, a business administration graduate student, was walking to the bookstore when she heard the sounds of the accident.

"I was on the east side of the street, and I didn't see him until it happened," Szczesniak said. "It was a scary thing to see."

She said she left the accident before the police or ambulance arrived because she did not want to see any more.

"There was a short Oriental girl on the other side of the street, and she saw the entire thing," Szczesniak said. "If anyone was in control, she was. She made sure an ambulance was called and that the girl who hit him didn't leave."

(see Accident, p. 6)

Student drew admiration

Beck's friends remember him as friendly, independent

by Steve Koziatek

SHORTHORN STAFF

Flags flew at half-staff on campus Wednesday to honor Andrew Beck, a graduate student who was struck by a car Tuesday night.

Beck, 35, missed the first week of classes to play in a wheelchair rugby game in Canada with the Dallas Rehabilitation Institute Colts. Tuesday was his first day back at UTA.

Many people were attracted to Beck's easy-going personality, and he made many friends as he rolled around the campus in a wheelchair decorated with the slogan, "Visualize World Peace."

"He was a very likeable person, very eclectic," said finance sophomore Robert Bell. "He liked to do things his own way, going to his own."

Beck sustained the injuries that confined him to a wheelchair in a 1983 car accident. He was driving to a new job in Dallas from Austin when he fell asleep at the wheel of his car near Waxahachie.

"One thing he'd tell anybody is that he found himself through his accident," said Tim Baltisberger, Beck's personal attendant for two years. "His wheelchair became an external manifestation of his and each man's internal prison or struggle."

Beck's determination to overcome his physical handicap is evident in his comments in a newspaper story published three years after the accident.

"You see someone doing something you used to do — I used to enjoy the samba — or something you thought you might want to do, and it all comes back," he said. "Just recently I had a walking dream again."

"There are smatterings of bitterness, I guess, but I think I've come through this with humor. I had a lot of support from my friends."



I think I've come through this (wheelchair confinement) with humor. I had a lot of support from my friends.

— Andy Beck

Those friends saw their support reciprocated.

"I roomed with him for eight months, and he's the only person I've roomed with that I didn't hate when I left," said pre-computer science engineering sophomore Dallas Armstrong. "We were real close friends."

Long-time friend Monique Jannette helped him through the recovery period after his accident and encouraged him to test himself.

"I learned from him, too," she said. "He was someone I could always count on."

Jannette said she and Beck agreed that the end of this life is not final.

"I'm sure we'll meet again sometime," she said. "He just doesn't die, he'll be there always. All I can say is I love him very much and I'll see him later."

Pre-business sophomore Deanna Greene called Beck "an awesome individual."

"He's the kind of person who, no matter how you meet him, it will be a good experience and you'll always remember it," she said. "He was always willing to help someone become more independent."

An active member of the UTA wheelchair athletic program, Beck was a three-year letterman on the Freewheelers track and field team and its captain the past two years.

He also was a member of the Texas Wheelchair Track and Field Team the past three years and met the national qualifying standards for all eight of the organization's track events in 1988.

Beck had hoped to qualify for the Pan American Games in Venezuela, but his competitive spirit did not equal his outgoing nature.

"He wanted to make 100 friends at the meet more than get medals from the events," said Jim Hayes, Handicapped Student Services director. "That was what Andy Beck was all about, that's what his forte was — people."

Beck won the Allan Saxe Handicapped Student Scholarship last year and Hayes said Beck was modest about his ability.

"He was hesitant to apply for the Allan

(see Beck, p. 6)



SHORTHORN: Michael Ainsworth

Andy Beck, pictured in a 1986 track meet, lettered three times in wheelchair sports.

From page one

Accident

Jim Hayes, Handicapped Student Services director, said a man driving behind the car that struck Beck called for an ambulance on his cellular telephone.

"The medical attention was phenomenal," he said. "The ambulance was there in two minutes, and he was at Arlington Memorial in seven minutes."

Beck was a native of Bogota, Colombia. His family of friends, according to Hayes, was in two places—Austin and Arlington. "He was reared in his middle years in Austin, but a different Andy came to Arlington," he said.

Beck's paralysis was a result of a 1983 auto accident. He was driving from Austin to Dallas for a job when he fell asleep at the wheel near Waxahachie.

He came to UTA in 1984 and in December received his bachelor of arts degree in English. Tuesday was his first day of graduate courses.

Beck spent the first week of the semester in Canada with the Dallas Rehabilitation Institute quad rugby team. Hayes said the sport was Beck's "latest love."

"He'd always loved soccer, and this is the closest thing in a chair we had," he said.

Col. Sidney Cheek of the campus police said this is the third campus fatality involving a student and an automobile in 19 years.

The first was four years ago at Mitchell and West streets, and a little more than a year ago a student on a motorcycle was hit by a truck at Third and Pecan streets. Seven or eight non-fatal pedestrian-automobile accidents have also occurred.

Physics Professor Ulrich Herrmann called the establishment of a street as busy as Cooper dissecting UTA an "example of stupidity."

"I don't hold anybody responsible," Dr. Herrmann said. "It is a street and it is a state highway. It belongs to the university, the city and the state."

Construction of a Cooper Street depression is slated to begin in May.

Beck is survived by his daughter, Robin, of Las Vegas; father and step-mother, Ira David and Ingeborg Beck of Mexico City; a sister, Samantha Nicoletti of Jackson, N.J.; and a brother, Peter Beck of Austin.

A memorial service is scheduled for 4 p.m. today at Greenwood-Mount Olivet Funeral Home, 400 Stadium Drive. Beck will be cremated. Expressions of sympathy should be made to UTA Handicapped Student Services.

Beck

Saxe scholarship because he felt other people needed it more than he did," Hayes said.

Baltisberger recalled a graduation party Beck gave for a friend.

"A hitchhiker came in, and Andy was adamant that the hitchhiker stay there, to extend his own hospitality," Baltisberger said. "He was an inspiration and he was a scholar.

"He was one of Emerson's 'repre-

sentative men.' He was a saint on wheels."

Halls

"Last semester was a learning process, being the first time to have the committee," she said. "It helped prepare for this semester."

Rundles said committee members intend to host an event each month of the semester and possibly award a trophy that will be passed among winning dorms.

She said the key to a successful program is proper advertising. She said the committee learned another valuable lesson last semester.

Brazos House vice president Laura Burson said that despite disappointing turnouts at some of last semester's events, she thinks the committee does a worthwhile job.

"For people who live on campus, you can make a lot of friends," Burson said. "It's worth the effort to bring them all together."

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