



The Campus Newsletter Blog for Volunteer State Community College

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Vol State Grad Finds Help (Human and otherwise) on the Road to a Doctoral Degree



The path to a doctoral degree can be arduous under the best of circumstances. Dr. James Perdue struggled more than most. His story begins with a backyard football game.

"I scored a touchdown and I put the ball down. I turned my back around towards everyone and another guy hit me. I heard something pop. I knew instantly that I was paralyzed."

Perdue was a quadriplegic. Surgery eventually gave him limited use of his arms. The school jock had to reevaluate everything in his life.

"I played baseball in Gallatin as a two-time MVP in high school. My dream was to play professional. When I was in high school I was just maintaining a C grade to keep playing."

The football accident happened while Perdue was attending Martin Methodist College in Pulaski on a baseball scholarship. The college freshman was derailed. He withdrew from school and physical therapy became his focus.

Perdue tried to return to college, taking classes at Vol State. He admits that he was only sitting-in on the classes and not really participating.

"After my injury what first started me going back to school wasn't for education, it was to get out of the house."

He dropped out of Vol State and went to work. Any journey requires help and his next step in education came thanks to a Vol State faculty member.

"Dr. Alice Amonette came into where I was working. After talking to her, I realized that if I was going to make it I needed an education."

Amonette wouldn't leave it at that. She knew the obstacles people face in returning to college. She asked for his personal information and returned later that week with a complete schedule of classes for him to take at Vol State. His brother helped to provide a new focus.

"He told me that the intensity and determination I used in baseball I needed to use now with education." Perdue graduated from Vol State in 1992 and earned a bachelor's degree at MTSU. He completed a master's degree in health and education a year later.

"I wanted to get into coaching and teaching. Coaching baseball at that time was my therapy." After years of teaching he decided to go back for a doctoral degree. However, he faced another huge challenge along the way.

"My health went down and I needed people to help me get dressed. I felt like a burden to people. One night I couldn't get into bed so I called my brother, who wasn't supposed to lift anything due to a health problem. He got me back into bed, but he ended up dying that night."

The guilt was too much for him to bear.

"I tried killing myself after that. Paramedics were called. I tried three times in three days."

Once again, an educator came to his rescue.

"Talking with the psychologist and my TSU doctoral chairperson put me right back in school. My advisor said 'James, you need to go back to school. You don't need to sit around worrying about things'."

Dr. Mary Ann Pangle got him back on track in college and the psychological help gave him the support he needed to keep going. Perdue finished his course work and dissertation for an Ed.D. in 2011.

"The main thing I've learned from all of this is that you can't do this alone. You have a support system whether you know it or not. People want to see you succeed."

You may have seen Dr. Perdue exercising on the Vol State campus with his service dog Ricardo. The black lab came from the Orlando chapter of Canine Companions for Independence. Ricardo can help Perdue if he falls by fetching the phone. He can open drawers and pick up keys. Perdue says the canine gives him a new measure of confidence. There are other benefits, as well.

"He's a great ice breaker to meet new people."

Perdue is sharing his story in a new book published by West Bow Press, a division of Thomas Nelson. "One More Play" chronicles his life struggles and accomplishments. He is also speaking publicly about his journey. "I had an epiphany and thought about a child that was disabled and about our soldiers coming back disabled from Afghanistan and Iraq. I started thinking- is there something I could do to help make life easier for them so they wouldn't have to struggle like I did?"

"One More Play" is available on Amazon. You can visit Dr. Perdue's website at www.jamesperduespeaks.com

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