

# How handicapped students cope with college

By Susan Duck  
Staff writer

For handicapped people, the satisfaction of doing things usually taken for granted is the impetus for striving to do more.

At a panel discussion, "Coping With College — Handicapper Style," held April 12 on Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills, three adult handicapped students relayed their struggles, successes and limitations.

The panel was part of Handicapper Awareness Week April 10-14. Florence Belgier, a Farmington Hills resident who suffers from Guillaine-Barre Syndrome, acquired after a viral flu, must cope with severe writing limitations because she's almost totally paralyzed. She uses a specially designed writing instrument and a tape recorder. Since Belgier began at OCC, she learned of a creative writing ability previously gone unnoticed.

"Although I'm older than the average college student, I found my age worked to my benefit, because I have so much to write about," she said.

After a lifetime of dyslexia, Joel Offett of Bloomfield Hills views college as a dream come true. "I came from a coal-mining community in the Appalachian Mountains and I never dreamed that I would be going to college."

HAZEL PARK resident Robert Brooks suffered a beating while being robbed in 1983. The beating left him with a closed head injury



Florence Belgier, who has Guillaine-Barre syndrome, candidly speaks about her experiences as a student at OCC during an April 12 panel discussion on campus.

and retrograde amnesia. Preserving his self-esteem while building his self-confidence is his greatest pleasure.

"I've managed to do everything I was told I wouldn't be able to do," Brooks said. "When I came out of the beating, I had a 100-word vocabulary. All I want to do is remove the obstacles of my past."

Getting into the mainstream of life with challenging physical problems was frightening to some extent

for the students, also.

All three must make extra time to do what non-handicapped people do naturally and quickly. This requires the cooperation of all involved, including instructors. In addition, the students often must make special arrangements, like tutoring. "People can be a lot more understanding than I give them credit for," said Brooks.

On Thursday, OCC administrators, faculty members and students rode around campus in wheelchairs to show their support and interest in special needs of handicapped students. The wheelchair riders also increased their awareness of the difficulties that handicapped students have on the Orchard Ridge Campus. Chairs for this event were donated by Home Care Inc.



photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Joel Offett, who has dyslexia, describes her experiences as a student at OCC. Behind her is Sue Pickering, a counselor at the college and moderator for the April 12 panel discussion on how handicappers cope on campus.

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