



FILE PHOTO

**It's her role:** Kim Leahy makes it a point to chat with others who are disabled. Here, during an April visit to Wing Lake Developmental Center in Bloomfield Hills, she spent time with Tino Rodriguez (right).



FILE PHOTO

**California bound:** Oakland County's very own Kim Leahy, who is this year's Ms. Wheelchair Michigan, competes next week in the Ms. Wheelchair America pageant in Anaheim, California.

## Ms. Wheelchair Michigan aims for national title

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

One of Michigan's top advocates for persons with disabilities next week is taking her act to the national stage.

This year's "Ms. Wheelchair Michigan," Kim Leahy, Sunday will travel to Anaheim, Calif. to compete in the Ms. Wheelchair America pageant. The competition will take place from Tuesday through Saturday, Aug. 12 at the Disneyland Hilton.

Before departing on her much-anticipated trek, there is some business to attend to for the 22-year-old Leahy, a 1990 Birming-

ham Marian High School graduate whose parents live in West Bloomfield. She attends Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

"I'll be preparing my speech for one of the final nights," said Leahy, confined to a wheelchair since birth with Spinal Muscular Atrophy. "I'll be finishing my scrapbook."

Her speech will be three-to-five minutes long, detailing what her disability has taught her and why. "I haven't even started it yet," she said Monday.

She also spent time last Thursday evening saying thanks to the people who have pledged support

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publicist

to her national bid, which is sponsored by Home Care of Michigan. Leahy and 14 others enjoyed a "kickoff" dinner at the Opus One restaurant in Detroit. Among those was her Royal Oak-based publicist, Franklin Dohanyos.

"She has the tenacity and the willpower of three people," Dohanyos said. "To know her, to talk to her, you'd never, never know she was disabled. She's been fun to work with. I really hope she comes back a winner for

herself . . . and for Michigan."

During a telephone interview Monday, Leahy said she was excited, even a little nervous, about her upcoming national title quest. "I'm anxious to meet the other girls. I just think it's so neat, because they're so accomplished."

Even though Leahy is still in her early 20s, advocating for the disabled is something she has done for a long time, and with great success. She volunteered to assist individuals with disabilities at Wing Lake Developmental Center in Bloomfield Township and in 1987 was named Volunteer of the Year by the Oakland Coun-

ty Association of Retarded Citizens.

And, from 1975 through 1993, she regularly guested on the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Leahy's continued dedication to her advocacy role is a main reason why she is delighted to be one of the candidates for Ms. Wheelchair America.

"I'm proud to be going to California to represent people with disabilities living in Michigan. I feel I'm an advocate. . . to eliminate the stereotypes that go along with having a disability," she said.

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