

Disability Doesn't Hinder Success

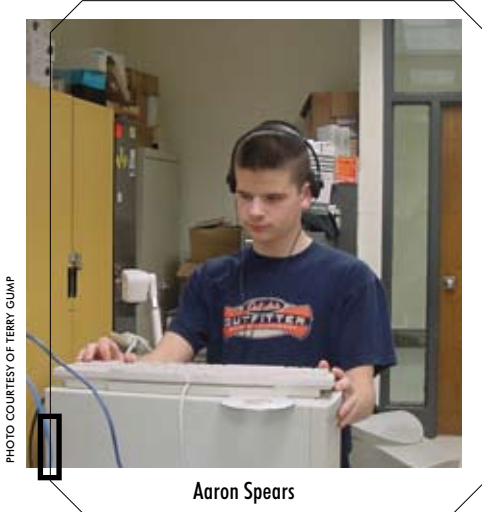


PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRY GUMP

Aaron Spears

AARON SPEARS REMAINS FOCUSED ON HIS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC COURSEWORK DESPITE MULTIPLE DISABILITIES.

FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, THE EVERYDAY

responsibilities of school that their peers take for granted can pose significant challenges. Seventeen-year-old Aaron Spears, a student at Roane-Jackson Technical Center in Leroy, West Virginia, knows this all too well. The student, born hearing impaired and partially blind, has not let his disabilities get in the way of working to accomplish his goal—opening his own business in computer sales and service.

His middle school education was not much out of the ordinary. Now in the 10th grade, his favorite subject is Algebra II and he also likes geometry. The accomplishment he is most proud of is completing the Cisco Networking Academy program, as well as the Aries networking technology program. Currently enrolled in the college preparatory track, he's thankful that his home school, Ripley High School, has done a good job of providing the most advanced technology available to accommodate his needs.

Aaron says good teachers at both

schools along with aides and other school support staff have made it easier for him to acquire the education he needs to succeed. His relationships with his contemporaries have been slightly impaired only because he insists that he be treated the same as everyone else.

"I become annoyed quickly when any student starts petting me or making me feel like I'm not the same as everybody else, by assisting me in activities with which I need no assistance," he says.

He gets on very well with his teachers who he says are quite impressed with his ability to take in information, and because of his friendly disposition. One teacher, Terry F. Gump, IT instructor and technology director at the center, says that working with Aaron has changed the way he teaches and presents information.

"He is an outstanding young man with a very bright future in technology . . . I've been teaching electronics and computer technology for 20 years and this has been the best year ever," Gump says. "I give a lot of credit to Aaron for inspiring me to think

outside the box." When asked if he's ever been discouraged by his challenges, Aaron admits that he has, but not for long.

"I used to have a very hard time with math before some pieces of valuable technology came along to help speed up the process and ease the strain," he says. "I always kept going because I had people around me who would have gone to school for me if it would have helped anything."

Aaron says that it is very important that students with disabilities know about the resources and technologies available that can assist them in their endeavors.

"If you think there's technology that might make things a little easier for you, make sure your teachers know about it, and ask if they can consider obtaining it for you." A cheery disposition also helps, he adds. ■

If you have a career-tech professional or student that you would like to profile, please contact N. Susan Emeagwali at semeagwali@acteonline.org.