

Can't is just another unsaid four-letter word for this award winner

By DEBORAH DURYEE
Correspondent

UPPER TOWNSHIP – According to her father, Dawn DuBois is a terrific speller. The one word, though, that doesn't seem to exist in Dawn's vocabulary is "c-a-n-t." Dawn has had to overcome some pretty tall obstacles in her 51 years. And having a can-do attitude seems to be the primary reason for her success. Whether it be working at Marshall's, volunteering at the Disabilities Resource Center as its official newspaper clipper, or working on her varied collections, Dawn is an inspiration to all who meet her.

Born in North Plainfield, Dawn and her parents moved to Seaville in 1988. Dawn has developmental disabilities but, because of her positive attitude, has lived a full and enriching life since the beginning.

According to her father, Rudolph DuBois, Dawn was not officially diagnosed as developmentally delayed until she was 9 years old. By that time, she was already mainstreamed in a regular school. Given some services such as speech and extra help, Dawn rose to the task.

"It was hard but my parents wanted me to do the best I could," explained Dawn. "I wanted to graduate."

And graduate she did, from North Plainfield High School in 1975 at the age of 20. That graduation was doubly sweet for the DuBois family because not only did Dawn graduate from high school, but her sister, Diane, who suffered from cystic fibrosis graduated from college.

An ardent lover of animals all of her life, Dawn parlayed that affection into her own pet sitting business while living up north.

"She had quite a few customers," recalled her father.

After moving to Seaville, Dawn took it upon herself to assimilate into her new community. Her first program was with the Jersey Cape Diagnostic Opportunity and Training Center. In 1992, Dawn took a position at the Ames store in Court House. She also volunteered at Burdette Tomlin Memorial Hospital working in its early childhood



Dawn DuBois, shown here with her father, Rudolph, will be honored Feb. 8 by the Disabilities Resource Center its fourth annual laureate awards dinner with a Salute to Family award.

center and medical records. After short stops at McDonald's and Super Fresh, it was back to Ames in 1997 where she worked until the store closed in 2002.

In 2003, she took a position at Marshall's and the rest, as they say, is history. Starting in the warehouse, where she helped intake new shipments, Dawn found her niche as a fitting room attendant. Now, working three days a week, she helps customers by sorting clothing they don't want in order to put it back onto the racks. She was recently named a "service star" for helping a customer who lost her handbag in the dressing room.

"I think she likes the people best," said Rudolph of his daughter's career choice.

"I like the people, but I also like getting paid," added Dawn with a smile.

In addition to her job, Dawn enjoys her many collections. Sitting on the sofa in her house amid her dolls, stuffed animals, and horses, Dawn shared her interest in her other hobbies.

"I love to read and watch television," she said. "I'm addicted to General Hospital."

In addition to reading books, Dawn loves to read newspapers.

A full life such as Dawn's is not without its sorrow. Her older sister, Diane, passed away in 1978 at the age of 27 from cystic fibrosis. Her mother, Joy, passed away suddenly in 2004. Dawn's collection of horse figurines serves as a memorial to her mother who was an accomplished equestrian.

Dawn's enthusiasm for life even permeates the neighborhood where she lives. Her neighbor,

Beverly Vieth, said "Anything you do for Dawn is so appreciated. She has a great heart. She's a totally great girl."

Another neighbor, Susan Dugan, couldn't agree more.

"I met Dawn a few years ago and I'm so impressed with her," she said.

The Disabilities Resource Center will be honoring Dawn and her father at its fourth annual laureate awards dinner on Feb. 8 with its Salute to Family award. Other honorees include Atlantic City Electric, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey and Harrah's Atlantic City Operations.

"We are very appreciative of the DuBois' commitment to Disabilities Resource Center through their generous monetary support and extremely valuable detailed clipping service that Dawn has provided through the years for (the Center's) scrapbook and archives," said Patricia Hurst, events coordinator for the Disabilities Resource Center.

According to Rudolph, "It's a great honor and recognition of all the work we've done. We've been blessed by the Lord with two special children."

When asked how she has made such remarkable strides in the face of what some may perceive as adversity, Dawn summed up her mantra for success.

"I'm friendly and hard-working. I've been through a lot of ups and downs but I persevere. If you have difficulties, always seek help," she said.

The Disabilities Resource Center's Laureate Awards Dinner will be held at the Ram's Head Inn on Thursday, Feb. 8. Tickets, which are still available, are \$85. Information about this event, as well as the Disabilities Resource Center and its programs, can be obtained by calling 646-0388.

Deborah Duryee can be e-mailed at gazette@catamaranmedia.com or you can comment on this story by calling 624-8900, ext. 250.