Blind student overcomes obstacles

By Cynthia Zdziej
Staff Writer

Goalball is an international sport for the blind that is played on a volleyball-size court with a three-pound ball full of bells.

Three players on each side take turns rolling the ball from fixed positions on each end and attempt to score on the opponents’ goal, which is as wide as the court.

Shelly Richards, a Rider freshman who has become a familiar figure on campus, along with her friendly guide dog, is a member of New Jersey’s goalball team and has traveled to play tournaments in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Colorado, Utah, Washington and Montreal.

“Our season runs from January to June and we have a tournament every month, so the rest of the year we practice,” said Richards. “The U.S. Nationals are in South Carolina in June.”

The determination Richards demonstrates playing goalball is just one example of the attitude she brings to all aspects of her life.

Besides her interest in athletics, the Haddon Township native is a double major in political science and Spanish, two subjects that have always interested her and that she has excelled in.

“I love to talk about politics and I think it is interesting to hear what people have to say,” said Richards. “I chose Spanish because I have studied it a lot in the past. I was placed in Spanish III this year.”

Richards is unsure of exactly what she wants to do after graduating from Rider, but has plenty of time to think about it.

“Right now I feel that going to graduate school or law school will be my most likely choice,” she said.

When she is not practicing or studying, she works at Gill Chapel, answering phones, running errands and cleaning up after events. Her efficient work is admired and appreciated.

“She is extremely adept in following through and figuring things out. I’m always impressed with the amount of information she remembers,” said Reverend Nancy Schluter, chapel coordinator. “She takes minutes at our meetings and does mailings for the Holocaust Center, among other things. She is our courier. For example, she can take important letters all over campus and collect things from Collegiate Press.”

Richards has Leber’s Disease and has never been able to see. Basically, her eyes do not produce the proper amount of pigment so her retinas did not fully develop. As a result she can only pick up light and shadows.

However, she has ways of meeting the demands of everyday life for those seemingly simple activities that people with sight take for granted. She uses different equipment to make studying and keeping up with classes easier, such as a Braille Life, which is a Braille keyboard that helps her record notes in class.

Richards also scans all of the handouts she receives into her computer, which reads them aloud. She can get her textbooks on tape from Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic or from the National Library for the Blind. If they are not available there, any book can be scanned and turned into audio as well.

“Sometimes it can be time-consuming, but if I ever can’t find the time, there are people in the Annex who can help me and it gets done fast,” said Richards.

She takes tests aloud in the Annex and can also answer longer essay questions by reciting her answer because her computer can transcribe for her.

Her very sociable dog, a black Labrador named Owego, also helps her find her way. Owego was born in a breeding center and after two months was placed in a family for a year to familiarize her with people. Next she was issued to an instructor, who trained her for about five months. After that time, Richards had to go live with the instructor and dog for one month and learn how to communicate with her.

“Owego responds to signals. She will let me know when we come to an intersection and I have to choose another direction, but she only goes ahead when it is safe,” said Richards. “She also remembers things well. If we ever pass a room I have class in, she will stop there until I tell her to go past.”

People who know her well describe Richards as a cheerful and well-spoken student who works well with her canine companion and does her best at whatever she attempts, achieving much success.

“I give her a huge amount of respect. She works hard, and her dog is fantastic, too; they always do what needs to be done,” said Schluter. “Her determination, despite her handicap, is outstanding.”

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FLAG show to be anything but a drag

By Lauren Varga
Staff Writer

High heels, tight skirts and extreme make-up: Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FLAG) presents FLAG in Drag Thursday, April 14, at 8 p.m. in the Bart Luedeke Center Theatre for the 2004 Drag Show. The show is a fundraising event for the Human Rights Campaign. Information will be available at the show about the campaign but for more information go to www.HRC.org.

“We will be handing out pamphlets of information about the Human Rights Campaign as well as play bills to each person in attendance,” said senior Gio Buschetta.

Hosting the event is none other than Buschetta himself, who will be MC for the entire night. The performers are not just the members of FLAG. There will be people from various organizations, including residents and commuters, taking part in this year’s Drag Show.

Bringing lots of change because these men are going to hit the catwalk and strut their stuff. Participants will choose their own music to lip sync to. Music selections for the night will range from “Dirty” by Christina Aguilera to a country rhyme by Martina McBride.

“We will have a wide range of music,” said Buschetta. “People can look forward to seeing performances from Christina Aguilera, Martina McBride and Cher.”

As the performers show off their talent and taste in both music and style be free to drop some change into that contestants bucket. The audience can show their appreciation to the performers by putting their donations into the bucket that represents the performer each audience member likes the most. At the end of the night the money in each bucket will be tallied up and the performer who raised the most money will be announced as the winner.

“We hope that everyone brings money to the event,” said Buschetta. “It’ll be a fun night but it is also for charity.”

There will also be a raffle for the audience members to participate in with prize rewards.

Many students are already planning around the drag show so they make sure that they are there front row, showing their support for FLAG and the Human Rights Campaign. Even if drag shows do not appeal to everyone, remember that there will be prizes. And who would want to miss appearances by Martina McBride, Christina Aguilera or Cher? Maybe someone will get lucky and snag one of the lovely ladies for the night.

So finish off the semester will some good music, fun outfits and lots of laughs at the FLAG in Drag show this upcoming week.