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New set of wheels

Non-profit helps disabled ex-sports mascot Matt Maw get modified van

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Seven years ago, Matt Maw's life changed forever when he fell during a gymnastics practice. In a split second, two vertebrae snapped, severing his spine and paralyzing him from the shoulders down.

The former Weber State University mascot went on to earn a bachelor's degree in statistics from USU and will finish his master's in May, but his disability prevented him from driving— until now.



In a few weeks, Maw will receive a modified van, allowing him to travel independently. Maw and his wife, Alia, purchased the new vehicle with help from the Utah Assistive Technology Foundation. The non-profit organization partners with Zions Bank to offer low-interest loans for items like hearing aids, print enlargers and Braille equipment. "Now I can drive myself places, something I haven't done in seven years," Maw said. "It's exciting and terrifying at the same time. I haven't driven in a long time, but I'm looking forward to it. I can be more independent and not have to rely on someone else. I don't have to find someone to help me get to school."

The minivan has been designed with all of the modifications Maw needs to drive, including reduced-effort steering, a lever for the brake and gas and a scrolling button for secondary controls like blinkers and wipers. The van also features a water moisture detection system that automatically turns on the windshield wipers. Other modifications include electronic tie downs and a lowered floor ramp for Maw's wheelchair.

"It's a nice van, a lot nicer than the one we have now," Maw said. "There is no way I

would spend this much money on a vehicle if I didn't have a disability. UATF is essential, and allows me to afford something like this. I would say that no one should hesitate to contact them."

In Maw's case, UATF offered a 4 percent interest rate, saving him \$100 a month compared to the 6.75 percent rate he would receive at most banks.

"That's a lot of money," Maw said. "I am really glad UATF is an option."

Maw particularly appreciated the simple loan application process.

Executive director Marilyn Hammond said the organization has always tried to keep paperwork to a minimum. "You just have to come in and fill out a form about what kind of device you need," she explained. "There are no income restrictions of any kind. Zions Bank makes it very easy. They'll even go out to people's homes if they have trouble getting to the bank."

Hammond stressed that UATF fills an unmet need because there is little funding for assistive technology. Since 1991, they have provided 939 loans worth \$4.5 million. "This is life-changing," she continued. "It's the difference between having to stay home and being able to go out in the workforce, go to school. It makes a huge difference in people's lives."

Maw agreed, saying he can't wait to help Alia with weekly chores like grocery shopping. "She hates going to Wal-Mart and I don't mind it so much, so she's sending me," he said with a laugh.

In April, he will also drive himself to his new job at Zars, a Salt Lake City pharmaceutical company where he will analyze research data. Maw is looking forward to the move, saying it will be a "good change" that signals new independence and growth.

"I feel really blessed," he continued. "We really are spoiled. Every day I look at the blessings I've received, and I am so appreciative."

For more information about UATF, visit www.uatf.org or call (800) 524-5152.

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