

# Homecomings highlight injured teen's senior year

High school senior Meghan Fiala had two Homecomings this fall. The first took place in early September, when Meghan returned home to David City following months of rehabilitation at Madonna. She was critically injured in a June 20 car accident outside her hometown.

The second event, two weeks later, was the traditional Homecoming a high school senior dreams of. It included a David City Aquinas football game, a dance, a beautiful dress and royalty. Homecoming Queen Meghan Fiala appreciates the significance of each homecoming in her life.

Recovering from a traumatic brain injury wasn't on Meghan's list of things to do last summer. The active teenager was busy with friends, sports, choosing outfits for senior pictures and thinking about colleges. Then in a blink of an eye—the moment a van broadsided her car—those teenage priorities changed dramatically.

Meghan was still in a coma when she came to Madonna. The traumatic brain injury affected her ability to move, communicate, and take care of herself. "When I first saw Meghan, she was able to follow basic commands only on occasion. She was just weaning from the vent and was not able to speak or eat," said speech therapist Teresa Springer. "What began to amaze us was the complexity of activities she was able to perform, such as spelling complex words and completing 3-digit multiplication, even at low levels of alertness."

"She worked so hard with everything we did and this really showed in her rapid progress," echoed Laura Corbridge, PT. "She worked day and night to get better. I taught her an ankle stretching program to do when she got up in the morning and her dad told me he woke up one night and found her stretching her ankles in the middle of the night before she got out of bed. Now that's dedication!"

As she gained strength, the rehab team simulated school environments in therapy, including having Meghan carry an exercise physiology textbook around. "She would just laugh about

it," Corbridge said.

Meghan, who said learning to walk again was the most difficult part of her rehabilitation, was one of Corbridge's and Madonna's first patients with a brain injury to use the body weight support treadmill in therapy. The treadmill allowed her to start moving, walking and supporting her weight earlier in her recovery.



Meghan was crowned Homecoming Queen at David City High School two weeks after leaving Madonna.

"The treadmill made a big difference," said mom Peggy Fiala. "It pushed her. It got her heart rate up and got her going again. We felt the quicker she got moving, the quicker her rehabilitation was going to be."

In addition to physical and emotional support, Madonna offers a spiritual aspect to rehabilitation. "A day that sticks out in my mind was the day Meghan received communion for the first time since her accident," Springer said. "When Father Rutten said the prayers before communion, Meghan became more attentive, opened her mouth readily and then made the sign of the cross afterward without our help. From then on, daily Mass and communion became an important part of her rehab."

"Meghan's family was here daily and were her biggest cheerleaders," said Peggy Reisher, case manager. "They always had faith she would have a wonderful recovery and her Dad would accept nothing less. They stayed positive and helped to keep her motivated."

"It's important to set goals, to not give up and to do what the therapists tell you to do," Meghan said. She made it her goal to be out of the wheelchair before she went home. She worked hard to regain movement in her right arm so she could pick up her charcoal and colored pencils and draw again. She met these goals and made it home in time to join her classmates for their final year of high school.

Today she's studying Art, Spanish, English, Religion, Anatomy and Government. Twice a week, she continues "class" at Madonna with outpatient physical, occupational and speech therapy. Is the 90-minute drive to Madonna after school worth the effort? "Oh yea!" said Peggy Fiala. "We're here with people who understand brain injury. They know when she's tired, and what her limits are. They give us hope."

Meghan, who enjoyed track, basketball and volleyball, continues to use the body weight support treadmill in outpatient therapy to reach her latest goal of running again, said Michelle Tieszen, PT. Meghan recently brought her senior pictures to Madonna to show her therapists and is talking about going to the University next year to study physical therapy.

"I want to help other people in the same way they helped me," said the 17-year-old.

"When looking at all the barriers Meghan overcame, she is truly an inspiration to all her classmates and other patients going through rehab," Springer said.

"Meghan and her family really depict what the spirit of Madonna is about," added Corbridge.