

*Alumnus of Distinction:*

## Rob Oliver '97 making a difference in the lives of others

The Pitt-Greensburg Alumni Association (PGAA) has named Rob Oliver '97, from White Oak, PA, as its 2012 Alumnus of Distinction.

The PGAA Alumnus of Distinction award recognizes excellence among alumni at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg based on outstanding level of professional achievements, service to the community, service to the University of Pittsburgh, special recognition or honors, and other special efforts or success. A certificate will be presented to Oliver at the 2012 Commencement ceremony, set for Saturday, April 28.



"We are elated to be able to honor Rob with this award," says Frank M. Spoto, Jr., Esq. UPG '99, '03 LAW, president of the PGAA. "Rob's passion and drive to help those around him achieve their everyday goals in life is the primary reason why he stood out among our outstanding nominees this year."

Oliver works for the Disability Rights Network as an advocacy specialist. He also is a motivational speaker and author. His autobiography, entitled *Still Walking*, shares his experiences of living with a disability as well as the important lessons he's learned along the way.

"I am extremely honored to receive this award," says Oliver. "It serves as recognition of the value of my work following graduation. I am humbled as well. Although my disability has provided challenges along the way, my goal has been to live life to the fullest. The only thing I have done is what everyone should do, don't focus on what we can't do, but make the most of the abilities we have."

Oliver was paralyzed from the chest down during a body surfing accident in North Carolina when he was 21 years old. After the accident, he went on to obtain his bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg and his master's degree in psychology from Duquesne University. He and his wife Becky (Clark) Oliver '94 are the parents of 10-year-old triplets Chloe, Lauren, and Josh.

His advocacy work with individuals provides people with protection from abuse and neglect, access to services and the opportunity to make their own choices. Additionally, his work also allows him to advocate for systems change, mostly focusing on the services provided by the State of Pennsylvania for people with disabilities. With the current budget situation, it is imperative to understand the implication of budget cuts and how those cuts are affecting the lives of real people. The third way he is changing other people's lives is through his speaking and book. The core message of his presentation is that everybody has problems.

"Our success in life is determined by whether we let those problems define us or we, instead, put our energy into doing what we can and focusing on the positive," he notes.

During the past year Oliver has provided motivational presentations *pro bono* to more than 24 local Rotary clubs.

His service to the community reaches further, though. In 1999, Oliver was appointed to the Community Living Advisory Committee by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. His role on this committee was to provide meaningful input to the Department of Public Welfare, the Department of Aging and the Office on Long-Term Living as they created policies, procedures, and programs serving individuals with disabilities across the Commonwealth.

He also has trained the staff and the participants of several organizations including the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living, Mental Health America, and Pennsylvania Advocacy Resources to strengthen their advocacy as an organization and as individuals. Until recently, he served on the board of directors for United Cerebral Palsy of Pittsburgh, one of the premier service organizations in Western Pennsylvania, and the Tommy Wilson Exceptional Student Foundation, which funds educational supports for students with special needs. ▲

## Upcoming PGAA Events

### Join us for Pitt Day in Harrisburg



Members of the Pitt-Greensburg group visited with State Representative Mike Reese (center) during the 2011 Pitt Day in Harrisburg.

Members of the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg community will again participate in Pitt Day in Harrisburg, scheduled for Tuesday, March 13. This event allows representatives from all of the Pitt campuses to speak with members of the General Assembly and provide a first-hand perspective of the challenges and changes facing Pitt Students.

The PGAA will sponsor a bus to Harrisburg that will depart from campus. Watch the Alumni E-Newsletter, the Pitt-Greensburg Official Alumni Page, and [www.greensburg.pitt.edu](http://www.greensburg.pitt.edu) for information about how to participate and other activities being planned. Or contact the Alumni Relations Office at 724-836-7496 or [upgalum@pitt.edu](mailto:upgalum@pitt.edu) to find out how you can participate. ▲