

## 'DORS' open for Bowie student with cerebral palsy

By **DAVID EMANUEL** Staff Writer

---

Bowieite Kelly Barrett has a lot to grin about.

The Eleanor Roosevelt High School student is soon off to the honors program at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

She also happens to have cerebral palsy.

Barrett has just about everything she needs to start her first year at the university. In addition to the typical college student-must-have list like a microwave, bed sheets and clothes drying rack, her list includes a new wheelchair and voice-recognition computer software that will help her write term papers.

Barrett was born with cerebral palsy and is one of the 5,001 high school students with disabilities who last year took part in programs offered by the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services, also known as DORS.

Those programs help students with disabilities, as well as their families, transition into higher education, job training or employment.

While in college, DORS will continue to provide support and follow her progress until she becomes employed.

In addition to majoring in psychology, she plans on taking part in wheelchair sports, joining a choir and taking part in college clubs. She was actively involved in high school, where she made the honor roll and had a role in "Seussical," this past year's school theater production.

And last summer, Barrett got a taste of college life when she attended the University of Maryland's Young Scholars Program, and the High School/High Tech Program, which provides promising students with disabilities who are interested in technology careers with job guidance, internships and college preparation experience.

During the month-long program, Barrett took a three-credit college math course, lived in the dorm and participated in an

internship at the National Institute of Mental Health.

Barrett said all of her experiences, from public schools to her first sample of college life, have helped her "see how she fits into the future," and that her disability will "not be a barrier."

"No matter who you are, this is who I am. Even if I have to do something differently, I can still do whatever others can do," she said. "My physical limitations do not equal my potential."

"For me, the reason why I kept doing what I was doing, and not giving up, was at first I felt like I had to prove myself, but then I kind of realized that the choices I made were for me more so than others. I was doing what I needed to do to make myself happy," she added.

Right now, she's "very excited, but also very nervous," about being this far away from home for so long.

"This has never happened before," she said. "My care has always been in other people's hands. Now I have to sink or swim on my own. But I'm ready."

Barrett will not have a roommate, but she said that at Edinboro there's 24-hour attendant care "so basically someone is there if I need them, but they're not in the room with me all the time. It's a really cool setup. And they have people who will help me at mealtimes."

Edinboro University has approximately 8,000 students, about 100 of whom are in wheelchairs, said Barrett.

"There is also a big group of others with disabilities who don't necessarily use wheelchairs," she said, "but Edinboro is a great place for people like me."

Barrett turns 18 in September, and plans right away on delving into psychology as her major, and possibly going for a minor in special education.

"Yes, I am a person with a disability, but I always kept a positive outlook, and I'm going to succeed," she said. "It's tough, but you get through things and you refocus, and I've always been somebody to try and get what I want, and I'll pretty much do anything to reach that goal. I'm not a person to be roped in by what anyone has said or done in the past. It definitely wasn't easy, but I know I have a great future ahead of me."

The Division of Rehabilitation Services offers a wide variety of other programs and services that help individuals with disabilities to establish careers and stay independent in their homes and communities. Visit [www.dors.state.md.us](http://www.dors.state.md.us) for information, or call Kathi Santora at 410-554-9435.