



Success Story Follow-Up Amy Ofenbeck

Amy Ofenbeck had a promising career as a television news anchor when she first moved to Southwest Florida. But those dreams were put on hold in 1997, when she suffered a grade-five brain aneurysm. Amy was just 26 years old.

After weeks of hospitalization, and months of physical, occupational, and speech therapy, Amy battled her way back on air, but the job had become much more difficult. Complications forced more surgeries, and Amy had to give up on her dream.

"It was really disheartening for me because I loved my job," says Amy. "But it was for the best."

Amy took on some part time work while on disability, but kept losing jobs because of short term memory problems. She was referred to Goodwill Industries of Southwest Florida for vocational rehabilitation, and Amy's employment consultant recommended her for a volunteer position in Goodwill's public relations department. After just six weeks, she was offered a part-time job as Public Relations Coordinator.

"All she needed was an employer to give her a chance and see her for her abilities, not her disabilities," says Carolyn Johnson, Goodwill's vice president of communication and development, and Amy's first supervisor at Goodwill. "I'm grateful that Goodwill was able to give her that chance."

Amy, who was named Goodwill's Chet Perry Achiever of the Year in 2005, and transferred to the E-Commerce department in 2008. As an E-commerce clerk, Amy posts items to Shopgoodwill.com, Goodwill's online auction site.

"I'm very limited in what I can do because of all the surgeries I've had," Amy explains. "I love to write, and I get to write item descriptions every day. It's repetitive, which helps with my memory. It's the perfect fit for me."

She still has struggles every day. To date, Amy has undergone eight brain surgeries and other procedures stemming from her aneurysm. Through it all, she values her job and her place in the community.

"I can't do nearly as many things as I could before, but that's okay, because I'm alive," she says. "I have to work. It's just in my blood. And if I wasn't here at Goodwill, I don't think I'd be working at all."

This year, Amy celebrated her 10-year anniversary with Goodwill.

"I love the mission. I love the fact that we help disabled people," says Amy. "It's nice to work with other people who have disabilities and see them succeed and see them do well, too."

"Amy is one of the most strong-willed people that I know, and I truly admire that about her," says Carolyn. "Her story reminds us all that unlike other minority groups, anyone can become disabled at any time. It's a sobering thought."

