

Gift of power wheelchair leaves man at West Palm Beach man speechless

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Wood Lake Nursing and Rehabilitation Center resident Jeremy Lowery celebrated his 28th birthday and was presented with a new motorized wheelchair by The Darrell Gwynn Foundation on Thursday, August 11, 2011. Ashley Weaver of Delray Beach, a social services assistant at the center, helped with him with a drink during the small party. Lowery was paralyzed in a car accident nearly a decade ago.

GREENACRES — A soft-spoken 28-year-old man celebrating his birthday surrounded by strangers and staff was speechless with gratitude as he rolled his power wheelchair into a small room at the Wood Lake Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Jeremy Lowery of West Palm Beach just repeated "wow" and "thank you so much" as members of the Darrell Gwynn Foundation, nurses and staff gathered to watch him lowered onto his \$22,000 wheelchair, which the foundation provided for free.

Lowery was paralyzed almost 10 years ago in a car accident when he swerved to avoid hitting a deer. He can't use his fingers or his legs, but he became self-sufficient with his

own apartment. Then his first power wheelchair was stolen, leaving him in the nursing home with neither family nor friends to support him.

The foundation, which started out with four wheelchair donations, now gives away about 40 wheelchairs a year to people with spinal injuries who can't afford them. Darrell Gwynn was a drag racer who suffered spinal injuries before beginning the foundation in 2002.

The foundation hopes to reach 50 donations next year to coincide with Gwynn's 50th birthday, Communications Director Ryan Rogers said.

Recipients either are recommended to the foundation, as Lowery was, or can apply for the program if they think their need is justified.

Lowery was suggested by a nurse while the foundation helped someone else at Wood Lake in March.

Angel Pardo, president of the company that helped customize the wheelchair, adjusted the power chair to fit Lowery's needs, discussing how to work and tweak the machine to suit him.

After Lowery was lowered onto the chair from his center-owned rolling bed, he looked at social service assistant Ashley Weaver and spoke in his quiet voice.

"I haven't really sat up in a year," he said.