



## Driven to Make a Difference

**W**hen Travis Watkins first learned he'd have to come up with a device to help a disabled person as part of a senior class project, he knew his idea for the project wouldn't come from any list. It would come from the heart.

Watkins' father, Jim, suffers from ALS, a crippling neuromuscular disease that robs people of their ability to move, speak and eat, while leaving their senses and mental abilities unimpaired.

"As soon as they mentioned the project, I put myself in my father's shoes and tried to think of the obstacles he has to overcome," Watkins says. Among those obstacles is driving his motorized wheelchair over rough terrain like sand, grass and mud.

Watkins proposed his idea for an all-terrain wheelchair

platform to project partners Robert Burn, Mark Chase and John Hopkins. Agreeing he was onto something, they set out to build the device—a 150-pound, five-foot by five-foot wheelchair platform with all-terrain wheels, sprockets and gears. A power wheelchair locks securely into place atop the platform and provides the power so no extra controls are needed.

Working about 15 hours a week, they perfected their device, unveiling the "All Terrain Electric Wheelchair Attachment (ATEWA)," better known as "The Tank," even before it was due. Professors Robert Mann and Steven Sundarrao were impressed.

The team has applied for a patent and is looking for a partner to manufacture and further develop their device, which Watkins says is the only one of its kind in the country today.

Meanwhile, Jim Watkins is back on the beach. And enjoying his newfound freedom.

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