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For Immediate Release

November 20, 2009

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MARQUEZ SHARES HER HOPE WITH MSH PATIENTS

WHITFIELD— Hope, according to 26-year-old Nicole Marquez, is the one thing no one can ever take away from you.

That's the message she shared with a group of patients at Mississippi State Hospital last week as she told them of the accident that claimed her ability to walk – along with her career and aspirations as a dancer – and of her journey of recovery ever since that day last August.

“You're a miracle and a blessing. Everybody's here for a reason, and so are you,” one patient said to Marquez after she had been standing in front of them for a half hour and sharing her story.

Marquez was living in New York last year when she ended up locked out of her apartment one night. She doesn't remember the accident, but she thought she could maybe figure a way down from the roof of her building to her sixth-floor apartment's window. She realized that wasn't a great idea, and remembers turning around, but nothing else. Apparently, she lost her footing and fell as she turned around and tried to walk away from the roof's ledge.

Her super found her the next day, lying in an alley behind the building, with a broken neck, broken spine, broken ribs, a fractured pelvis, a punctured and collapsed lung and lacerations from falling on broken glass.

But one year later, she was able to walk into a room – slowly, and with the help of a cane – and share her story with others. That's what she does now. She's not quite able to dance like she used to, but that day will get here, she said.

“Where there's darkness, there's always hope,” Marquez said. “The one thing no one can take away from you is hope.

“When people ask when I'm going to dance again, I just tell them I'll be dancing again when I'm dancing again. I don't know when that will happen, but it'll happen.”

In the mean time, since getting up in front of crowds never bothered her, she's spending her time telling others about her story and her hope. She'll be doing that exact thing on Dec. 1 at St. Andrew's Episcopal School, which is why she visited Mississippi State Hospital. Art instructor Tony DiFatta invited her to speak to some of his students and inspire them in their work.

“They’re helping me put together some artwork that will show there is a light in every darkness,” Marquez said.

Hopefully, she will be able to do the same thing at other schools around the area.

“If I can bring a positive message, that’s what I’d like to do,” she said. “I’d like to show kids, and adults as well, that bad things do happen, but it’s very easy to pick yourself up from those situations. Well, it may not be easy, but you can do it.”

That’s the message DiFatta hopes his students got out of hearing her speak.

“I’ll just let them interpret the theme how they want to,” he said. “The next couple of lesson plans, I’ll tie into this, and we’ll see what happens.”

Those who heard Marquez speak were impressed by her attitude – ask her to pose for a picture and she would rather use her cane as an air guitar than a prop – and positive outlook. Even so, she said she has her good days and her bad days. As she says, she’s not a robot; she’s still human. She just keeps remembering how the doctors first thought she wouldn’t walk again, and thinking about the first time she wiggled her toe, and the first step she took after the fall.

She said she isn’t upset about her situation, and she’s glad it happened to her instead of someone else she loves. She is waiting for the day she can dance like she used to. Until then, she told DiFatta’s students that she is simply thinking of this phase of her life as a new chapter.

“So why not turn the page and see what’s next?” she said.

MSH, a facility of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, was founded in 1855 and facilitates improvement in the quality of life for Mississippians who are in need of mental health, chemical dependency or nursing home services, by rehabilitating to the least restrictive environment, utilizing a range of psychiatric and medical services, which reflect the accepted standard of care and are in compliance with statutory and regulatory guidelines. The hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission.

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PHOTO ATTACHED:

Photo 1: Nicole Marquez and MSH art instructor Tony DiFatta

Photo 2: Nicole Marquez speaks to patients at Mississippi State Hospital. The patients will be lending her some work for when she speaks to students at St. Andrew’s Episcopal School next month.