ALAN DUNLOP/TORONTO STAR

Positive outlook: A car accident three years ago left Al Ramji,-24, of Springdale Blvd., Scarborough paralyzed from the waist down. Sister Rubina, 14, looks over gifts employees of Towers department store at Warden and Finch Aves. presented him with on the weekend.

Paraplegic comes a long way but he's still looking for a job

By Malcolm Johnson Toronto Star

Al Ramji has come a long way since a car accident three years ago turned his world upside down and left him paralyzed from the waist down.

"My main dream now is getting a job and then I can truly say my handicap has not affected me," the East York man who graduates in June from George Brown College said in an interview.

That dream seems within reach now. Ramji, 24, has several job interviews with Metro hotels lined up this week.

He has been able to conquer his disability with a positive attitude and the help of family and friends.

In Scarborough, 130 employees of Towers department store at Warden and Finch Aves. — where his father works — "adopted him during the International Year of the Disabled. As a special project, they raised about $2,500 to buy him a wheelchair, walker, leg braces and an orthopedic bed.

"I'm overwhelmed by your kindness," he told the employees who gathered at a wine and cheese party Saturday night to present the gifts to him. "I have no words to express my feelings for what you have done."

Store manager Earl Wilson said everyone benefited from the project, started last February. "We were able to help Al and we also helped ourselves because we did something as a group outside the work place which brought us a lot closer together."

"We wanted to do something for someone we knew," added Claire MacLean, another store employee.

Ramji had completed his first year in George Brown's hotel management course and was returning after working in Banff for the summer when the accident happened.

"I was supposed to fly back, but Air Canada was on strike at the time and I accepted a ride with another student," Ramji said. The car they were riding in overturned in Montana and the driver was killed.

Ramji spent 2½ years in Lyndhurst Hospital in Toronto, studying part-time while there. He returned to school about six months ago after his family bought a van equipped with hand controls.

His father also spent about $40,000 modifying their Springdale Blvd. home to make it accessible for a wheelchair. He had to get special permission from East York to put in an underground garage and elevator to accommodate it.

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