

Dad's injuries threatened plans to become teacher

Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship provided opportunity

By Pamela Gould, ATSSA Staff

Daniel Hart's father led the Cub Scout troop he and his older brother took part in as kids. He started a Boy Scout troop when they got older because there wasn't one in their community. And he was always there to encourage Daniel in sports.

Daniel and his father were always close, but when Thomas Hart became permanently disabled in a work zone incident last year, they grew even closer.

Thomas Hart, then 53, was working as a foreman for United Fence & Guardrail Corp. on Long Island, N.Y., on March 27, 2019 when a vehicle broadsided his work truck shortly after 2 p.m. Hart had pulled the truck—which was equipped with hazard and construction lights—off the side of the Southern State Parkway to fill out reports and was parked there when an out-of-control vehicle plowed into the driver's side.

He suffered a concussion and multiple other injuries to his neck and the left side of his body. He has undergone several surgeries since then and has more on the horizon.

Daniel, now 18, is the youngest of three siblings and with his father unable to work and in need of ongoing medical care, he wondered if his career plans might need revision. But when his Dad discovered The American Traffic Safety Services Foundation Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship Program, he had renewed hope.

This spring, Daniel was one of 14 students awarded a scholarship for the 2020–21 academic year. The scholarship program is competitive and offers up to \$10,000 annually for the dependents of roadway workers killed or permanently disabled in work zone incidents. Students who demonstrate a strong commitment to volunteerism are eligible to apply for an additional \$1,000 scholarship given in honor of Chuck Bailey, a roadway safety industry member who died in 2002.

Daniel received both scholarships, earning the Chuck Bailey Memorial Scholarship for



Daniel Hart celebrated his high school graduation at a local restaurant in Long Island, N.Y., with his parents and older brother. They weren't able to celebrate at a restaurant until August because of restrictions due to the pandemic. The special event included, from left, brother Thomas Hart IV, mother Elizabeth Hart, Daniel, and father Thomas Hart III.

his many volunteer efforts in his hometown of Ridge, N.Y. That included building benches for a local historic site as part of his Eagle Scout service project.

His favorite activity, however, is the "Blessings in a Backpack" program that provides food for needy children to sustain them through the weekend. Daniel helped pack the food on Tuesdays after school. They were then sent home in backpacks on Fridays.

"I was very surprised [The Foundation] has a scholarship program to help people like us," Daniel said. "This really helps.... I think that without it I wouldn't be able to attend the college I chose."

News of the scholarship was especially helpful in the spring when the pandemic made it even harder to find financial resources, he said.

Daniel's goal is to become an elementary school teacher. He was inspired by his first-grade teacher and believes the initial years of schooling provide the foundation for success he needed to help him all the way to graduation.

With all that the family's been through, Daniel considered not leaving for a college that's

five hours away, but his father wanted him to seize the opportunity, so he started at the State University of New York at Cortland in August.

"My dad is one of the biggest inspirations of my life," Daniel said. "He has shown me that whatever happens—even in the hardest times of your life—he's there for me, even in what he's been going through."

Since his father's accident, everyone in the family has pitched in to help with Thomas Hart's care. They initially needed to help him move safely through the house because of the concussion's effects and an injured leg.

Daniel helped him with stairs and drove him to medical appointments after school and on weekends. One time, when his mother couldn't be there, he stayed overnight in the hospital so his dad wouldn't be alone.

He never thought he might lose his father until the first surgery when he was scheduled to be hospitalized for one night and it stretched into four. Since then, each surgery produces that fear.

"It's a constant," he said. "It also teaches me to never take him for granted." 🙏

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