

News from **Senator Tom Libous**

For Immediate Release:

March 30, 2010

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A profile in courage: Mason Markosky and his mom

Mason Markosky and his mom, Catherine, recently visited Senator Libous in his Binghamton office to share with him their experience with Southern Tier Alternative Therapy's (STAT) Riding Connection program.

100 percent of doctors told Catherine that her son would need a wheelchair and was unlikely to ever walk. At one point, "Mason was sent home to die in our living room on life support and he's now a living, breathing, nine-year-old boy, cute as ever, too" said Catherine.

Mason started equine therapy when he was three-years-old. At that time he wasn't able to sit up unassisted or bear any weight. Through equine therapy, Mason developed balance, body awareness and muscle tone by reacting to the horse's movements.

After a few years of therapy, Mason developed skills and strength that allowed him to walk for the first time just before his eighth birthday. Catherine said, "When he started walking in a walker, I brought him in to see his orthopedic surgeon and when he saw Mason walk down the hallway, he nearly fainted."

Catherine's experience with equine therapy is what led her to start STAT. "When you witness something as amazing as your child talking or walking for the first time, especially after years of traditional therapy with very little notable progress, you become hooked," said Catherine. "This is where my passion stems from."

STAT is a 501(C)(3) that is run completely by volunteers. STAT's alternative and animal assisted therapies enhance the quality of life for individuals with special needs. In just two years they've gone from providing 10 therapy scholarships to more than 650.

"Throughout my career I've learned so much from kids and adults with special needs," said Senator Libous. "Like Mason, they each have their own story of courage and strength that blows you away. You can't help but be inspired by them."

To learn more about STAT's programs for individuals with special needs or how you can help, please visit their website at www.statinc.org.

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