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## Former resident named Indiana Hero

**Elizabeth Gist**  
Staff Writer

— Former Rushville resident Darcy Keith was selected as an Indiana Hero by the Indiana Pacers organization and will be honored with the award Friday during the Pacers home game with the Atlanta Hawks.

Keith was selected for the honor for her positive brain injury prevention advocacy role, inspirational speaking presentations and for also playing an important role by providing testimony for Indiana's new seat belt law as the only unbuckled back seat survivor in a fatal car crash.

"I'm humbled to have been included with those identified as Indiana Heroes by the Pacers organization," Keith said. "While some may call me a hero, I don't look at it that way. We all help others in our own special way, though some actions may be more public than others."

Pacers Sports and Entertainment's community outreach program, "Indiana Heroes," allows the Indiana Pacers to pay tribute and honor those who have made a tremendous impact on the lives of other Hoosiers throughout the state of Indiana. Through their unique commitment and humanitarian spirit, these award-winners have made exceptional and lasting contributions to our community and our state. The first honorees of the award were members of Indiana Concerns of Police Survivors (ICOPS). While on a bicycle ride around the state to raise funds and awareness for their group, two officers, Indiana State Trooper Gary Dudley and Lake County Sheriff's Department Chief Gary Martin, were killed when a truck hit their support vehicle, knocking it into the riders. This group, in memory of their fallen comrades, the cause it was riding for, and its representation of safety for the citizens of Indiana, were deemed extremely worthy of being the first "Indiana Heroes."

"This is a program we've worked on throughout the summer," said Pacers CEO/President Donnie Walsh in a press release. "We wanted a way to recognize those people who make the state of Indiana a special place to live through efforts many of us do not see."

Darcy Keith will now join ranks with these officers as a recipient of the Heroes award. Keith was involved in an accident at the age of 22 as a student at Ball State University. She was on her way home from Morehead State University in Kentucky with four of her sorority sisters when their car was hit from behind by a semi-tractor-trailer. The car was crushed completely by an impact so severe that the license plate of the semi-tractor was imprinted into the car's crumpled side panel. Only the two young women in the front seat were wearing their seatbelts and literally walked away from the accident unharmed.

Darcy was in the back seat with two of her friends, who were killed instantly. The impact of the collision with the semi forced one sister upside down against the roof of the car and broke her neck. The last thing Keith said she remembered was stopping to eat at a restaurant and changing spots in the car with one of the girls in the back seat to sit directly behind the driver. It was that seat change that would save her life.

Darcy remained in the critical care unit of the University of Cincinnati Hospital for 13 days with a closed-head injury, the first six days of which she was in a coma. For rehabilitation, she was moved back to Indianapolis, where she had to learn to walk and talk again, with paralysis of half of her body. But she fought her way through it.

"I never thought that a single incident would force a 22-year-old college senior to start over as a small child in every aspect imaginable," Keith states on her Web site. "The mental, physical, and emotional

injuries were indescribable. But, when I was down in the quicksand of pain, anguish, and despair, I decided that I was going to climb to solid ground through fortitude, perseverance and determination.” When Darcy lost her two friends in the accident she also lost the ability to do the higher math associated with her major, actuarial science, forcing her to start over again in another major after rehabilitation. She received her diploma in 1993 in insurance and has worked as a commercial insurance underwriter for State Auto Insurance since 1996.

She has also added motivational speaking to her resume, lobbying Statehouse officials for tougher seat-belt laws and visiting high school classrooms to promote brain injury prevention.

She has been awarded many distinguishing honors, including the Ball State University Graduate of the Last Decade, a Fox-59 Unsung Hero Award, and a ThinkFirst VIP Speaker of the Year honor.

Among her many speaking engagements, she has addressed crowds at the Indiana Statehouse, Ohio State University, Butler University, Ball State, and several Indianapolis-area high schools and churches.

“It’s the obligation of the cured to help others,” Keith said. “My motivation to speak and assist others came from wanting to help other brain injury survivors and their families. I then realized that the message of overcoming life’s challenges applies to everyone at some point. This is why I want to share my secrets of success and achieving the unimaginable in life.”

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