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## Lawrenceville native overcomes adversity Roth wins Ms. Wheelchair California competition

By Deanna Allen  
Staff Writer

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**LAWRENCEVILLE** - Alyson Roth is beautiful, as one might expect of a woman who wears a crown and carries a pageant title.

But the Lawrenceville native is one of those people others would call beautiful on the inside and out, as her title bears witness. As the Ms. Wheelchair California 2009, Roth is an advocate for advancing issues of inclusion and equality for people with disabilities and helping those who have been recently disabled know their futures are still bright.

The former Gwinnett educator - she taught music at Hopkins Elementary in Lilburn from 2002-05 - became disabled following a car accident in 2000 that left her with a spinal cord injury and paralyzed from the waist down.

"When I got hurt in 2000, it was a very, very lonely and depressing time for me, to be honest," Roth said. "It was a time where I didn't think life could go on. I didn't think I could still have fun and do normal activities and be in community with other people my age."

But her life has gone on. Roth has since obtained a degree in music education from Samford University in 2002 and a master's in elementary reading and literacy from Walden University in 2005. She has helped make Yosemite National Park more wheelchair friendly as a member of the board of directors there, has assisted in building a Habitat for Humanity house for a disabled Atlanta resident and has traveled to Nicaragua to work at an orphanage for children with disabilities and teach music at a school for the blind.

She has also traveled to Mexico to deliver wheelchairs to the country's poorest disabled people and worked with the former president of Mexico, Vicente Fox, on the importance of providing wheelchairs to residents.

While the 30-year-old moved to California to teach, she now works as development manager for Free Wheelchair Mission, a nonprofit that distributes wheelchairs to poorer people around the world with disabilities. Roth plans to travel to Rwanda in September to deliver wheelchairs for the organization, amid the various speaking engagements and appearances that have filled her calendar since she won her title.

Along with her busy schedule, Roth is being followed by a camera crew.

"They're everywhere," she laughed. "They follow me at work, at church."

As Ms. Wheelchair California, Roth is expected to be featured in a documentary on the Ms. Wheelchair America organization.

The camera crew will follow Roth Sunday as she surfs with an organization that promotes adaptive sports for people with disabilities, and in the coming months as she goes on to compete in the national 2010 Ms. Wheelchair America competition, which is held the last week in August.

"It's just to bring more awareness and education to the public," Roth said of the documentary. "People with disabilities are mothers, are teachers, they go grocery shopping, go swimming. We do everything that everyone else does."

And more, it seems, in Roth's case.

"I definitely believe it's important that we have stuff like this to bring people into better awareness of what my life is like," Roth said. "Although I have a smile on my face most of the day, I still have times when I have to adjust (with my disability) to be able to live a productive life."

### Related Links

Alyson Roth's blog: [www.mswheelchaircalifornia2009.blogspot.com](http://www.mswheelchaircalifornia2009.blogspot.com)