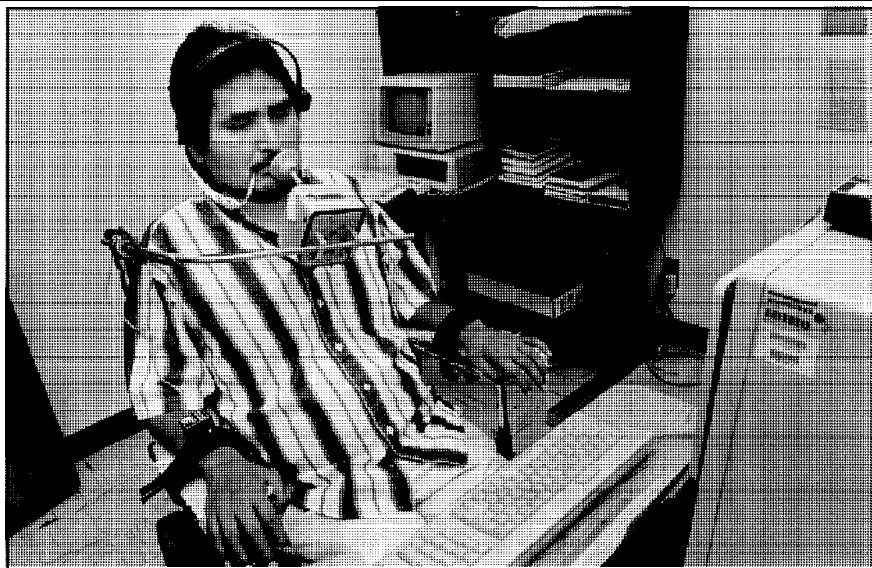


Daily Sun

Quadriplegic enters work world aided by 'Star Wars technology'



Franklin Halwood, a data entry operator / research technician at Northern Arizona University, uses a special headset that allows him to operate a Macintosh Computer. Halwood became a quadriplegic after being involved in a car accident when he was 18.

By JAN STEVENS

Community News Editor

In a small office located on the campus of Northern Arizona University, Franklin Halwood sits in front of a computer and studies the screen.

The cursor on the computer's screen moves quickly from file to file as Halwood completes his work, yet his hands remain motionless at his sides.

Until 1 1/2 years ago, Halwood spent much of his time reading or watching television, Computer work, or any other type of employment, was not even a consideration. Involved in an automobile accident when he was 18, Halwood suffered a broken neck and a smashed spinal cord which resulted in his being paralyzed from the neck down. For the past 16, years he has been a resident of geriatric nursing homes.

But thanks to what Halwood's vocational rehabilitation counselor calls "Star Wars technology," Halwood, 34, is now both employable and employed. He is working as a data entry / research technician for American Indian Research and Training Center at NAU's Institute for Human Development.

Roger Nosker of the Rehabilitation Services Administration said that what made employment possible for Halwood was computerized

technology that was not available until recently. In fact, Halwood, who is Navajo, became the first quadriplegic in the state to use voice recognition which allowed him to create graphic designs on the computer, Nosker said.

"To me it's pretty science fiction," said Nosker. "He can operate a computer and a telephone. He's working and increasing his skills. And not only that, this guy is a taxpayer."

Halwood started out in his job using a voice activated computer, but that system proved less than ideal for his situation. The voice activator was very sensitive. A sudden noise such as someone slamming or opening the door often gave the computer a command Halwood had not intended or erased everything he had input that day.

"It was a problem. There was a lot I couldn't do that I can do now. And I would lose a lot of information that had to be re-programmed. That took a lot of extra time," Halwood said.

Nosker said at that time, the voice activator was the only technology available, but it gave Halwood a chance to become employable. A number of changes since then have made it easier for Halwood to complete his work.

Independant living is an ambitious goal for Halwood and many other Americans with disabilities. Unfortunately everyday tasks like using the telephone and turning on the television often

prove to be major obstacles in the path to this independence.

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Halwood now uses a headset equipped with ultra sonic beams on the side and top of his head which circumvent the need of a hand-held mouse. The ultra sonic beams allow him to operate the computer with movements of his head along with a "sip-n-puff" attachment that he blows into. Part of the equipment also allows him to dial the telephone and make it possible to control the room's environment.

"He now is able to regulate the temperature of the room, and he'll have the capability to turn a fan on, the lights off and on or the heat up," Nosker said.

Although Halwood currently relies on the help of job coach Charylle Dearborn, provided by Goodwill of Northern Arizona, the necessity of her assistance has decreased with the new equipment.

Nosker said he is also hopeful Halwood will be able to expand his skills at computer graphics. Halwood, who discovered a talent for art about two years ago, paints several hours a day by holding a paintbrush in his teeth. A year ago, one of his paintings was selected to be featured in a national exhibition for artists with disabilities in Washington, D.C. He also designed a logo and cover for a brochure for a national conference on technology available for rehabilitation of Native Americans.

"We hope to use more of his artistic talent, and we would like to see him continue his education. My hope is that one day, and I don't know if it's possible, that he can live independently and leave the nursing home," said Nosker. "Right now that's not possible, because the resources don't exist for that, But I think Franklin sees a future now that wasn't there before.

"I know we achieved at least one level of success when we were talking about work — hard things, things he liked — and he said sometimes the hardest thing was getting up and going to work when he just didn't want to. I thought that was a key indicator that we were doing some good things here. He's just like the rest of us."