

“I am Capable” says Laura Leath

That’s what 37 year old Laura Leath will tell you, despite some challenges she has had to overcome. Laura recently completed her tractor-trailer training and earned her CDL at West Georgia Technical College in LaGrange, GA. She had a full time job offer from Fastenal Company before she had completed the course.

Not only was Laura the only female in the class, she is the first amputee who has graduated from the commercial truck driver program at West Georgia Tech. “We are very proud of her,” said Ray Benefield, Program Chair. He was amazed at how hard Laura worked, “to overcome the physical hurdles of using the strong clutch in a big truck.”

“I am capable,” is Laura’s motto. She most certainly is capable. Laura is raising four children; one is an infant she adopted 16 months ago. She was widowed in 2002 and it was only a year later when she was involved in an accident at work that resulted in the loss of her leg.

“I have always been drawn to what is considered men’s work,” Laura admitted. “I’ve been a welder (MIG, TIG, and ACR), machine operator, and forklift operator.” It was during her shift as a forklift operator when the accident occurred. She was crushed between a support beam and the equipment which resulted in the need for 42 surgeries and two years in a wheel chair.

“I didn’t want to sit at home and feel sorry for myself,” Laura said, “I wanted to return to the workforce and be a contributing member of society.” Laura attended West Georgia Technical College in September where she attended classes each day from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. She drove 40 miles each way to class, but insists that she would not have gotten the same support anywhere else. “I couldn’t have done it without Ray and my fellow students,” Laura shared.

Despite being the only female in class, her male classmates supported and encouraged her. “They didn’t treat me differently because I was

female or because I have a disability,” she insisted. She said that the other students mentored and supported her, even on her roughest days.

Laura also credits her mother for giving her the initiative to continue. “There were several days when I went to school crying,” she admits. Her mom encouraged her and didn’t try to dissuade her into a less demanding profession. “She was truly proud of me,” Laura said.

Because of the amputation, it was often more difficult for Laura to master the physical requirements needed to drive (and shift) a tractor-trailer. She was weak from the surgeries and the time spent in a wheel chair. She walked often to build up

her strength and adapt to the prosthesis. Shifting the clutch was a special challenge, but one that Laura was determined to overcome.

“My kids are really proud of me,” Laura said. “I am trying to set a good example for them. I wanted to return to the workforce. I want to show my kids that you shouldn’t let anything hold you back.”

Laura Leath doesn’t appear to let anything hold her back from succeeding, even in a male dominated environment and even with a disability. Her goal is to encourage other women and anyone who might feel that a disability is too great a challenge to overcome. She wants to persuade others to pursue their goals, regardless of the obstacles they might face. Laura added, “It would help [me to] add meaning to what I have gone through to get to where I am today, and where I will hopefully be in the near future!”

Laura Leath is definitely capable, and her children, her mother, and Ray Benefield and the staff at West Georgia Technical College are all proud of her success.

Laura Leath is more than capable, she is an example for all of us in facing and overcoming obstacles. We’re proud to have Laura as one of our Women In Trucking members.



Laura Leath