

Grants roll in for wheelchair tennis



Courtesy Photo / Lynn Bender, Collegiate Wheelchair Tennis Director
Good grant: Tom Daglis, on behalf of the United States Professional Tennis Association, presents a check to the GVSU wheelchair tennis team organization. The \$2,000 grant will go toward the team's travel expenses.

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Two grants totaling \$2,700 are helping the first collegiate wheelchair tennis team at Grand Valley State University pay for travel expenses and team uniforms.

GVSU's Wheelchair Tennis Team, the Rolling Lakers, received their most recent grant from the United States Professional Tennis Association last week. The team applied for the grant several months ago and received a check for \$2,000 on Thursday. The money will go specifically toward travel expenses for the team's first collegiate competition in February.

"We applied and requested funding because (wheelchair tennis) is a new program at Grand Valley," said Lynn Bender, WTT program director. "We don't have any pre-existing funding, so we are basically starting from scratch."

The USPTA grant came shortly after the West Michigan Tennis Association awarded the team with a \$700 grant. The WMTA is a local program of the United States Tennis Association, Bender said. The smaller grant was used to purchase the team's uniforms.

"The students are working really hard to get fundraisers together to raise a few hundred dollars here and there," Bender said. "They're making the effort to go the extra mile, because grant money isn't always a guarantee." All of the team's work from the summer is finally paying off, she added.

For members of the team, the grants represent more than just financial assistance.

"The money helped us gain support to become united," said Jessica Sporte, WTT president. "We're finally becoming official."

Although the two grants have provided financial support for traveling and uniforms, other expenses still need to be covered, Sporte said.

The WTT recently applied for grants with the Christopher Reeve's Foundation and the United States Professional Tennis Registry.

"If we get those grants, they will probably go to things like a banner and promotion for the organization," said WTT Vice President, Bryan Wilkinson. "Because (the team) is new, our biggest thing is getting out there and passing fliers around to gain support and recognition."

Wilkinson said although he and the other team members have been applying for the grants, the team's ultimate goal is to get able-bodied students involved with the organizational aspects of the team.

"A person doesn't have to be a player to make the executive decisions of the team," he said.

Bender agreed with Wilkinson and hopes the students and the university itself will become more involved and supportive, she said.

"Our goal from Grand Valley is to get the student funding from Student Life," Bender said. The competitive travel grant from the Office of Student Life would help cover the team's traveling and tournament expenses, she added.

The OSL travel grant is available to GVSU sports clubs. To be eligible for funding, the team must submit paperwork to the OSL within four weeks of the tournament dates, so the first application for the WTT will not be due until January, Bender said.

"Somehow, somewhere, something will come through," she said. "We have a great program and a great cause. The team benefits the university by encouraging students to play the first disabled collegiate sports team in GVSU history."

The WTT will continue to raise funds for future expenses, Bender said. Students or organizations interested in helping the WTT raise funds can contact WTT President Jessica Spote via e-mail, Jess_Spote@sporteonline.com.

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