

Couple couldn't go to Tarleton, so Tarleton came to them

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## Graduation day

\*Students seriously injured in wreck receive diplomas in hospital room

FORT WORTH - Colt Price smiled when Shelby Thiebaud entered the room.

Friday was their graduation day from Tarleton State University, and the couple wore matching black caps and gowns. Thiebaud wore a ceremonial stole over her shoulders in Tarleton's traditional purple. A crowd of parents, grandparents, cousins and friends beamed with pride. Some snapped pictures. Some got teary-eyed.

"It is our lucky day," Thiebaud, 20, told Price, 22. "Look at us go."

The ceremony was held Friday in a trauma unit at Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Fort Worth - believed to be a first for the hospital and the university. Both graduates, who have been dating for two years, are recovering from injuries suffered in a wreck this month in Erath County.

Because of their injuries, they can't attend Tarleton's fall commencement ceremonies today in Stephenville. So university leaders brought the celebration to them a day early.

"Be bold. Be courageous. Be determined - even as you move forward in your recovery," university President F. Dominic Dottavio said.

Everyone chuckled when Dottavio added, "Wear purple."

Price smiled from his hospital bed during the ceremony, and Thiebaud listened from a wheelchair parked next to him.

Nurses, doctors and relatives stood nearby as Dottavio told the students how graduation marks a special time and the culmination of much hard work. Price was presented a Bachelor of Science in industrial technology and Thiebaud received a Bachelor of Science in animal industries.

"I'm so excited," Thiebaud said.

Parents and friends of the graduates said the ceremony was good for their recovery.

"I think it's a good day for him," said Price's father, Rod Price. "He's excited and that's all that matters."

## The accident

Colt Price and Thiebaud were passengers in a 2005 Dodge 3500 pickup Dec. 4 when it was struck by an 18-wheeler on U.S. 67, according to Department of Public Safety reports. The driver and the front passenger in the pickup and the driver of the 18-wheeler suffered minor injuries.

Thiebaud was ejected and suffered several injuries including a broken pelvis.

Price was left with serious spinal cord injuries, a broken back and a broken neck; a tracheotomy helps him breathe.

"This is the hardest thing we've ever been through in our lives," said Price's mother, Carol Price. Carol Price said she expects her son to start rehabilitation next week. With hard work, he may walk again someday, she said.

"It's between God and Colt," she said.

Carol Price has become her son's voice as he relies on the breathing machine. When he was asked how he felt about the ceremony, his response via his mother was "pretty awesome."

A new chance at life

Thiebaud, whose jaw had to be wired, will need plastic surgery, said her mother, Judy Thiebaud. Shelby Thiebaud is in rehabilitation and trying to work her way to using a walker.

She said she was unconscious for about a week after the wreck and doesn't remember the details.

"I know nothing about what happened other than what I have been told," she said, adding that one of her fears was that she wouldn't be able to graduate.

She finished her credits in about 2 1/2 years because she took summer sessions and had 23 credits when she started college.

When she woke up, it felt as if she was given a new chance at life.

"I told my grandma: 'God made me funnier this time.'"

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