



KURT L. VINSON / GAZETTE

John Targowski, a Portage Central senior whose legs have been paralyzed since the age of 13, will walk up to get his diploma at graduation ceremonies tonight, thanks to a microcomputer.

Walk of accomplishment

BY TOM CHMIELEWSKI
KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

John Targowski will do something tonight that would have been impossible for a paraplegic to do 10 years ago: He will walk up to receive his high school diploma.

The legs of the Portage Central High School senior have been paralyzed ever since he fell out of a tree when he was 13.

But paralyzed is a relative term in Targowski's case. When he straps on a micro-

puter to his waist and tapes electrodes to his legs, he can walk.

It is a halting gait, aided by a lightweight metal walker. And it's still easier for him to get around in a wheelchair. But, unlike many who use wheelchairs, his legs haven't atrophied.

Tonight at 7 at McCamley Field will be the first time he will walk at high school.

He decided to do it at his parents' urging to show how far he and the technology has come.

His father, Andrew Targowski, has long been an advocate of inte-

grating computers into everyday lives since he was a computer expert in his native Poland.

The Western Michigan University professor won't be attending tonight's ceremonies since he's in Seoul, Korea, teaching computer courses. But his mother, Inmunia Targowski, a physician with a family practice in Kalamazoo, will be there.

John Targowski uses the Parastep system made by Sigmads Inc. of Northfield, Ill.

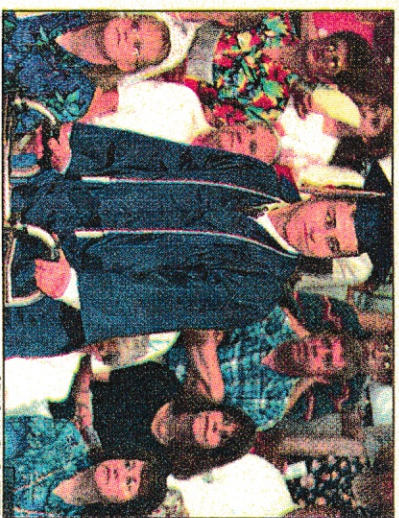
It's a microcomputer that provides electronic stimulation to

the leg muscles, causing them to move in a stepping fashion. He said it sends a tiny electric jolt to a nerve that affects the reflex that would be involved, for example, if you were to step on a nail.

Targowski still needs a metal frame walker for balance and support.

But there are controls on the walker, connected by wires to the microcomputer, he keeps in a leather pouch strapped to his waist and to electrodes taped to

Please see **GRADUATE, A2**



CHAG ALLEN / GAZETTE

Stepping into a new life

John Targowski, a Portage Central High School senior whose legs have been paralyzed since he was 13, stood to receive his diploma Friday, with the help of a microcomputer. The computer provides electronic stimulation to his leg muscles so they move in a stepping fashion.

GRADUATE

From Page A1

various spots on his legs and thighs.

With all his electrodes connected and leaning on the walker in front of his wheelchair, he pushes the "stand" button, and his legs raise him up.

He pushes another button, "right step," and his leg steps up. In a smooth swinging motion of his upper body, he swings the leg forward and steps down on it

with a leaning on the brace.

Then he presses the "left step" button and repeats the process.

It's slow. It's tedious. You have to have a walker, Targowski said. "It's a first step. It just gives the ability for a paraplegic to ambulate and take short walks. I use it for the health, just to be able to stand."

He walks around the neighborhood for about an hour every day after school.

There are only about 400 to 500 of these systems being used in the country, and Sigmads rates Targowski as one of the top five

most prolific users of the system. He is one of only two people on the system who can walk a mile with it.

"It was about a year after my accident that I first began therapy with Parastep," he said. "My legs were atrophied after only a year."

"Just because I've always been aware of my own appearance, that kind of drove me to do something about it. I didn't want to look like you know, little legs, and big upper body."

He emphasized the Parastep is "not meant to replace the wheelchair." But it does exercise his still healthy legs, and gives him a psychological boost.

When Targowski fell from a tree in 1991, he dislocated his spine and severed his spinal cord, leaving his legs paralyzed.

"It didn't hit me until maybe I was in rehab, until I finally got into a wheelchair," he said. "They had to teach me how to get dressed again, how to go to the bathroom, how to reorganize my life, basically. That's when it hit me."

But Targowski was an active kid before the accident, and the fall hasn't changed that.

The signs of an active life are there — like the parts of his newly delivered hand-powered bicycle spread across the front doorway. He is a licensed scuba diver, and downhill skis on a seat strapped to one ski.

John Targowski's limited walking blends what both his parents work for. "It's like a marriage between the computer and the health industry," he said.

Targowski plans to attend the University of Michigan in the fall to study biology, and hopes to attend medical school and follow in his mother's footsteps.