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Yes, people in wheelchairs can fly.

**ABLE Pilot and the University of Utah Department of Mechanical Engineering
Collaborate To Teach Persons with Paralysis to Fly**

For immediate release

Salt Lake City, UT – ABLE Pilot, a chapter of the United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, and the University of Utah, Department of Mechanical Engineering, have combined resources to develop technology that will allow persons with spinal cord injuries and paralysis to fly paragliders by themselves with minimal assistance.

Paragliding is one of the most exhilarating and fastest growing forms of personal aviation, enjoyed by nearly 200,000 people worldwide (there are 5,000 paragliding pilots in the United States).

Paragliding flight instructors are routinely approached by persons with a spinal cord injury (SCI) and paralysis, seeking the opportunity to fly. Mark Gaskill, an advanced paragliding and tandem instructor, and Vice President of the United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, has provided tandem paragliding flights to several people with SCIs and varying degrees of paralysis. He commented that after completing these introductory flights participants usually ask, "Where do I sign up, how do I go about learning to fly on my own?" Unfortunately, the technology does not currently exist to safely and smartly provide instruction to people restricted to wheelchairs.

This is about to change thanks to ABLE Pilot and a team of University of Utah Mechanical Engineering students lead by Dr. Donald Bloswick. This team of talented, creative, and motivated students, faculty and professionals have taken on the challenge of developing engineering and design solutions for adaptive equipment that will help get people out of a wheelchair and into the air.

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Paragliding is a wonderful opportunity for persons with a SCI/paralysis to interact with his/her environment in new and exhilarating ways. Flight is a three dimensional and extremely mobile activity. **It requires the pilot to think in spatial terms that are often under-challenged by persons with SCIs.** The social, emotional and recreational benefits of bringing paragliding opportunities to persons with a SCI are expected to be great.

Once in the air, a pilot with a SCI can participate on equal footing with all other pilots. **This represents an opportunity rarely seen in other adaptive sports or recreational activities and provides a life-changing, confidence-inspiring experience that can't be matched by any other activity.**

The design team anticipates having a prototype ready for flight-testing in April 2010 and expects it to be available for competition flying at the Utah AAA Sprints over the Memorial Day weekend (an annual competition for paragliding pilots at the Point of the Mountain in Draper, UT).

This project is funded by charitable donations and grant funding through:

- Foundation for Free Flight - www.ushgf.org/
- Neuroworx – www.neuroworx.org/
- Department of Mechanical Engineering - www.mech.utah.edu/
- ABLE Pilot - www.ablepilot.com
- Utah AAA Sprints – www.AAASprints.com

Information on Paragliding can be found through: www.ushpa.org

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