

9 May 2011

Press Release

## **FORMER SOLDIER BILLY WINS OUTSTANDING ADULT LEARNER AWARD**

**Inspirational CRC student Billy Baxter, a former staff sergeant who lost his sight in the Bosnian conflict, has won an Outstanding Individual Learner award for his dedication and commitment to learning.**

The 47 year-old Performing Arts student, who spent 20 years in the army before developing a rare virus from the terrible task of exhuming bodies from mass graves, lost his job and his home after losing his sight – but fought back to make a new life for himself and his family.

A born entertainer, he already uses his performance talents to raise money for charity – dressed as his alter ego Miss Belinda Bat – and is no stranger to other challenges. He holds the world blind land speed record for a solo ride on a motorbike, after reaching more than 164 miles an hour, and has appeared on *Top Gear* as the ‘blind man in a reasonably-priced car’.

After losing his sight, Billy, from Ely, went to St Dunstan’s – a charity that provides rehabilitation to ex-service men and women –where he was inspired to look to the future. He learned new skills and adapted existing ones as part of his rehabilitation and he began sharing his experiences by encouraging others to accept their blindness and embrace life.

In 2009, he enrolled on a National Diploma Performing Arts course at Cambridge Regional College to develop formal training in public speaking and performance, with

the aim of being able once more to enjoy army life by entertaining the troops as a show-host and stand-up comedian.



Billy as charity fundraiser Miss Belinda Bat and as himself in CRC's Performing Arts theatre

Billy, who left school at 15, bravely entered education as a 45-year-old in a class of teenagers and consistently achieved high marks – including a distinction with 96 per cent in his Bronze LAMDA exam. “Money couldn’t buy what I’ve learned from coming here to Cambridge Regional College – you couldn’t put a price on how valuable coming to college has been for me. My life – and that of my family – is so much richer for it,” he said.

Billy’s learning journey has been recognised by the top award for the eastern region, presented as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Adult Learners’ Week celebrations next week. He will receive the honour at a national awards’ ceremony in London on Monday, followed by a visit to the House of Commons as a guest of MP Jim Paice, and later in the week attend a regional awards’ event at Duxford Imperial War Museum.

Alan Tuckett, NIACE Chief Executive, said: “The stories of our award winners once again this year, the 20<sup>th</sup> Adult Learners’ Week, illustrate the overwhelmingly positive impact that learning has on people’s lives. The transformation that Billy has experienced is due to his dedication, persistence and ambition. I hope that adults across the country will be inspired by Billy’s story to take up learning and discover for themselves a whole new life.”

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## **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

For more information, please contact Lynn O’Shea, Communications & PR Manager, on 01223 418773 or email [loshea@camre.ac.uk](mailto:loshea@camre.ac.uk)

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Cambridge Regional College** is one of the largest providers of full-time further education for 16 to 19 year-olds in the eastern region, with more than 4,000 full-time and 6,000 part-time students. Students come in from a 40-mile radius, covering

Cambridge and its surrounding villages, eastern Bedfordshire, northern Essex and western Suffolk. Over 80 per cent of full-time students are aged 16 to 18 years old and come to the College after secondary school; the rest are mature students, studying on a range of Access to Higher Education and vocational programmes.

**Adult Learners' Week, 14 – 20 May 2011**, is the largest annual celebration of adult learning in the UK. It is supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, European Social Fund, Next Step, Open University, BBC, Pearson, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, Community Learning Champions, Local Government Association and Reed in Partnership.

Adult Learners' Week 2011 will include the following national events:

Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 May: **Cultural Diversity Weekend**

Monday 16 May: **Adult Learners' Week National Award Ceremony** - QEII Conference Centre, London

Tuesday 17 May: **National Policy Conference** - jointly organised by the British Library and NIACE

Wednesday 18 May: **Adult Learners' Week Parliamentary Reception** - House of Commons, Westminster

Thursday 19 May: **Learning at Work Day**

Friday 20 May: **Digital Day** and **Silver Surfers' Day**

A national helpline – **Next Step** - is available year-round for confidential advice and information about careers and courses. The call handlers will have access to the NIACE website and can give information about local activities during Adult Learners' Week. Calls are free on 0800 100 900.

Events for Adult Learners' Week 2011 are listed in the interactive online event diary at [www.alw.org.uk/events](http://www.alw.org.uk/events) where you can search by keyword, your preferred date and by

the region you live in. Or call **Next Step** free on 0800 100 900 to find Adult Learners' Week events in your area.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is a core sponsor of Adult Learners' Week. In England, in 2007-2013, the ESF will invest £2.5 billion to extend skills and employment opportunities. For more information about the ESF and its funding opportunities visit: [www.dwp.gov.uk/esf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/esf)

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is the leading non-government organisation for lifelong learning in England, and exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in better-quality learning of all kinds. It celebrates the achievements of all adult learners.