

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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PARALYZED "SUPERMAN," WIFE HONORED WITH TALL TEXAN AWARD

DALLAS — February 22, 1996 — Flat on his back with a respirator doing his breathing for him — after a tragic fall from a horse — actor Christopher Reeve and his wife, Dana, stand tall in faith and courage.

Their ordeal has heightened public awareness of spinal cord injuries to levels previously unknown. Because of that, and their subsequent commitment to active roles in public education and support for research, the Reeves have been named recipients of the first "Tall Texan Award."

The award will be presented at the annual Southwestern Ball in Dallas on Saturday, March 2. Proceeds from the Southwestern Ball support paralysis research at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

Designed by Tiffany & Co., the Tall Texan Award is a crystal obelisk crowned by a single star symbolic of the Lone Star State. The inscription says in part: "This Tall Texan Award honors Dana and Christopher Reeve for their diligent and exceptional service in increasing public awareness of spinal cord injuries and research."

It will be presented annually to the persons, institution or corporation that has contributed the most to raising public awareness of spinal cord injuries and the need for research to find a cure.

"Christopher Reeve is alive today because of recent advances in treating and stabilizing paralyzing injuries," said Buford Berry, co-chairman of this year's Southwestern Ball with his wife, Sally. "An ultimate cure for paralysis is a question of 'when,' not 'if.' And the outspoken support of courageous people like Dana and Christopher Reeve are helping speed that day."

Kent Waldrep, founder and president of the Kent Waldrep National Paralysis Foundation, praised the Reeves for speaking out on behalf of victims of spinal cord injuries and their families. "Never before has there been such an outpouring of public attention and awareness of spinal cord injuries and support for the tremendous need for research," he said. "It has been a real team effort

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on their part."

After his injury in May 1995, Christopher Reeve joined the boards of Waldrep's National Paralysis Foundation (NPF) and the American Paralysis Association (APA). The two groups are working toward a merger later this year.

Waldrep was paralyzed by a football injury in 1974. In 1989 his foundation began sponsoring an annual gala to raise support for UT Southwestern's paralysis research efforts. So far the Southwestern Ball has raised \$2.6 million which has been matched by an anonymous donor, bringing the total to \$5.2 million. The overall goal is to raise \$10 million to support spinal cord injury research at UT Southwestern.

"Kent Waldrep's leadership, the hard work of the chairs of the Southwestern Ball and the generosity of many donors have already enabled us to recruit one of the world's leading authorities in neurological development," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, UT Southwestern president. "We are grateful for their support of neuroscience research that will someday enable us to help and heal people who suffer from spinal cord injuries."

Proceeds from the ball have been used to establish the Center for Research on Nerve Growth and Regeneration at UT Southwestern. Leading the center's research effort is Dr. Luis F. Parada, an internationally recognized developmental neurobiologist. He and his team are studying how neurons are generated in embryos, in the hope that this information can be applied to gene therapy for injured adults.

Named last year to a blue-ribbon international consortium of neuroscientists sponsored by the APA and NPF, Parada is collaborating on research aimed at solving the clinical puzzle of nerve regeneration. Director of the Center for Developmental Biology at UT Southwestern, he holds the Diana and Richard C. Strauss Professorship in Developmental Biology.

"It is possible that the genes involved in generating nerves in the embryo can be manipulated to stimulate nerve cells to regrow," Parada said. Unlike most other cells of the body, nerve cells do not normally regenerate.

The support of the Southwestern Ball and "Tall Texans" like New Yorkers Christopher and Dana Reeve will help translate the discoveries of researchers to the patient's bedside, he said.

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