A PILLAR — Luke Bailey today, after not only surviving a life-altering crash but going on to realize both dreams and potential.

RECHS junior pushes past massive wreck to new challenges

By Jamey Cross
Special to The Courier-Tribune

Three years ago, when Luke Bailey was just 15 years old, his life took a drastic turn. Today, he’s a reigning state champion and nationally ranked Beta Club member.

A fateful day

While on the way to the flea market with his stepfather one Saturday morning in February of 2015, their usual routine was interrupted when a drunk driver entered their lane, heading toward them at 85 mph. The two cars collided — head on.

In an attempt to lessen the impact on Bailey, his stepfather thought fast enough to turn the car — taking the majority of the blow himself. Bailey’s mother, Teresa Hardister, said her husband sustained massive injuries that are still healing to this day. She said the impact from the front and the 200 pounds of wood they had in the back of their truck practically crushed him. He broke everything from the waist down and had both lungs collapse. He still has five surgeries to go, and most likely won’t make a full recovery.

Bailey also suffered substantial injuries in the collision. The seat belt tore through this neck and caused massive bleeding, and Bailey’s ribs, sternum and arm were broken.

Aside from physical injuries, Bailey was also left with Post Traumatic Stress from the accident.

Over the last three years, Bailey, now a rising junior at Randolph Early College High School (RECHS), has been able to recover and completely defy his family’s expectations of what he would accomplish.

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English test. Students from across the state competed for the chance to represent North Carolina at the national convention in Savannah, Georgia, and Bailey earned it.

“They called me for first and my mind was blown,” he said.

Backstage from the national convention last week, Bailey called his mom and told her he was one of the top five in the nation for Language Arts. She was ecstatic.

Bailey has always had a passion for reading and writing, and studying Language Arts seemed to come naturally with that. This passion only seemed appropriate as his mother is a published author and her mother was an English teacher.

He plans to study English in college and feels the calling to be a teacher.

“Language Arts is where my heart is and it’s what I’m good at,” he said. “So I know I can understand it enough to teach it to someone else.”

He called his mom after the ceremony and told her he placed third in the nation. She said she couldn’t believe it.

Bailey was excited about the ranking, but was even more excited about getting to hopefully place higher next year.

“I’ve got next year and hopefully I’ll go even further — third in the nation is awesome, but first is my goal,” he said.

Amazed and in awe

The accident completely changed the lives of Bailey and his family, but his mother said they were completely amazed at Bailey’s ability to stay encouraged and motivated through it all. She said all the trauma he’s seen could have amounted to him being hooked on pain-killers or giving up, but it didn’t. She said his past motivated him to do his best.

“We’ve seen some really rough stuff, but Luke has amazed us,” Hardister said.

Hardister said since the accident and by watching him thrive despite the adversity he’s faced, her perspective has changed. Because of the support her family received from the community, she said she’s made it her personal mission to give back in any way she can. And the pride she has in her son is abundant.

“To see him flourish like this has been insane,” she said. “I’m just in awe of him.”