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Press Release

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GYMNAST FINDS KEY TO SUCCESS

ALLEN, TX: Determined – the perfect word to describe Makenna Wellborn, a young woman on the road to a comeback. This 17-year-old Plano resident has had more than her share of roadblocks, but is not letting that deter her from her passion – gymnastics.

In 2005, Makenna was the USA Gymnastics (USAG) Level 8 State and Regional all-around silver medalist. She was having a great level 8 season and level 9 looked promising until her coaches

moved to a different gym. The season went downhill, ending in a broken hand the day before State Championships. In the fall of 2006 she began training with a previous coach. While working on tumbling passes in October that year, she hit her head and suffered a severe concussion. She temporarily lost her vision and could only remember things for a minute or so at a time. Her mother, Pam, recalls, "It was terrifying! She would scream out for me, I would tell her I was there and loved her, then a minute later she would scream out again." In response to the medication they gave Makenna for her head, she developed over 30 ulcers. Although the ulcers healed, just months later, in April 2007, she needed an appendectomy. But the obstacles didn't stop there.

Just two years ago this buoyant teenager was in a Dallas hospital with life-threatening blood clots. As a child Makenna had been diagnosed with a disease that prevents her body from fighting off infections as efficiently as needed. By March 2006 she was receiving so many infusions that doctors put in a mediport, or port-a-cath, to deliver the medication. But the port had been placed in a small vein and over time blood clots formed. In May 2007, after exhibiting frightening symptoms, she met the doctor at the hospital, where she had emergency surgery to remove the port. Afterward she was told that gymnastics was out of the question for at least the next six months while she was on blood thinners to prevent further clotting.

Wanting to stay in shape, Makenna tried to maintain a level of conditioning, but was cautioned that another blow to her head could be fatal while on blood thinners. She was getting healthier, but the inability to consistently train at the same level as her teammates led her to retire from competitive gymnastics. She began competitive cheerleading, where she rediscovered that her true passion was gymnastics.

Now completely healthy and off blood thinners for well over a year, Makenna began to indulge in her passion by attending open gym at Eagle's Wings Athletics (EWA) in Allen. In February 2009, she started researching gymnastics programs that would allow her to be competitive. It would need to be a program that allowed her to gradually build up her training schedule in a way that was safe for her body, while still challenging her to learn new skills. She was excited to find out that EWA had just such a program. After meeting with EWA's Alan Kirby and Maria Garcia, coaches for the U.S. Association of Independent Gymnastics Clubs (USAIGC) program, Makenna knew she had found exactly what she needed. In fact, EWA is the only gym in the state that offers this program to gymnasts of all levels.

She began training just a few hours a week, and six weeks later competed for the first time in three years. "Makenna has been with my team for eight weeks now and I am in awe of how much she has learned and re-gained," said Coach Kirby. "She is a true

inspiration for her new teammates and other gymnasts in the gym to see how determined and dedicated she is to making a comeback in gymnastics. And she is making a comeback. At the rate she is learning, I expect for her to be Level 10 ready by the end of the summer." She has already qualified for both Regional and National Championships in June.

All this and a better than perfect GPA at Spring Creek Academy in Plano prove that, for this young woman, determination is the key to success.

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