



*Sam Washington proudly points to the entrance of the National Rehabilitation Hospital's patient education center named for his stepson, Dion Johnson.*

# A LEGACY OF HOPE

## Story and Photos by Dave Krecke

When they settled into their seats at the state play-off game in November 1993, Samuel Washington, a project manager in the technology office for the Bureaus of International Information Programs and Education and Cultural Affairs, and his wife Wanda, an acting director for blind rehabilitation service in the Department of Veterans Affairs, had no idea this high school football game would be a defining event in both their lives.

On the opening kickoff, Sam's stepson Dion Johnson, a junior linebacker for Frederick Douglass High School in Upper Marlboro, Md., collided helmet-to-helmet with the ball carrier and two players on his own team. With his feet firmly planted, Dion's neck absorbed the jarring force of the collision, traumatizing his spinal cord and leaving the 16-year-old a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down.

A helicopter carried him to the Washington Hospital Center and, three weeks later, a paralyzed but stabilized Dion

was transferred to the nearby National Rehabilitation Hospital for physical therapy and instruction on operating equipment that would help him live a meaningful life.

While there, Dion met LaShonne Fraley, whose spinal cord had been injured three years earlier by a random bullet fired in a drive-by shooting outside her Southeast Washington, D.C., home while she was sitting in her living room watching television. LaShonne was the perfect model for Dion, buoying his spirits and inspiring him to stretch himself to his physical, mental and emotional limits in his struggle to return to as normal and productive a life as possible. Today, she remembers telling Dion, "The doctor doesn't always have the last say. Your own body will tell you when you're at your limit."

With an unbelievably positive attitude and unwavering determination, Dion made progress even the most optimistic observer would have judged impossible. He graduated from high school on time with the help of tutors and academic note takers and won a scholarship to Bowie State University. A communications major, he served an internship at Chan-