

Student

From A1

began spending after-school hours each day in the agri-science building. Hagemann soon realized that she was looking at an above-average student with natural leadership skills. Now president of the FFA, Markham leads the club's monthly meetings.

"People are in awe of her," Hagemann said. "She just has the most positive outlook of anybody I've ever met."

Markham has her eye on one more achievement in her high school career: competing on the track and field team as a wheelchair athlete in shotput and racing.

Markham said it took a long

time for her to find a turning point that allowed her to emerge from the darker days of her recovery.

Around the start of her senior year at Union Grove, she said, she stopped crying herself to sleep at night and stopped praying for answers. She came to a realization that her paralysis is not a punishment — but an opportunity.

The young girl who always wanted to become a changemaker in the world is now getting the chance to do that.

"It's like a gift, almost," she said. "I always wanted to be an influencer. This is how I can do it."

Her stepfather, Eric Brown, said the family has provided support to help Markham adjust to her new lifestyle. Most of the time, though, she needs little, if any,

encouragement or assistance.

On her first day home from the hospital, she insisted on climbing out of her wheelchair and taking a ride on her horse.

Brown said the snowboarding accident and paralysis have motivated — even forced — his stepdaughter to grow up quickly. The ordeal seems to have "kick-started" her arrival as a young adult, he said.

"It's pretty remarkable," he said. "Natalie has a special spark to her."