



## NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Blind City Tech Student from Afghanistan to Compete in New York City Marathon**

Brooklyn, NY -- October 19, 2006 -- It won't be hard to spot 45-year-old Nooria Nodrat among the 37,000 or so runners participating in the New York City Marathon on November 5. She'll be the one in an Achilles Track Club t-shirt accompanied by a coterie of six runners, one of whom will be tethered to her with a dish towel.

One of 20 totally blind participants seeking to complete the grueling 26.2-mile course, Nodrat, a student at New York City College of Technology/CUNY (City Tech) majoring in human services, has been there before; this marks the third marathon in which she has competed. Her support team of volunteers from the Achilles Track Club will help her avoid collisions, stay upright throughout the course and find toilets and water.

Her achievement is all the more remarkable given a daunting array of difficulties and tragedies that lay in her path. Born in Kabul in 1961, long before the Taliban took over Afghanistan, Nodrat remembers the country as an old world poised for change -- a world where women had to accept a subservient role. At 16, she entered an arranged marriage with a man 21 years her senior. They had two children, a son and a daughter.

Both her oldest brother, Zia, whom she idolized, and her husband were blind. To be of assistance to them, she learned Braille, unaware of how necessary that skill would become later in her life. She worked as an editor in the Publishing Services Department at the Institute for the Blind in Afghanistan, proofreading large print books and checking Braille texts.

In 1988, her brother was kidnapped by fanatics and never heard from again. A few years later, her husband of ten years was killed by a terrorist bomb. Soon after, Nodrat came with her parents to the United States, leaving her children with her husband's brother, who then refused to send them after her. Finally, in 1996, after five agonizing years, she was reunited with her children in New York. "Women in my country have to be patient. Very, very patient," she says.

In 1997, tragedy struck again. Nodrat was attacked in the subway by a mentally disturbed teenager who threw her to the floor and repeatedly punched her in the head, destroying her retinas, which were already weak from glaucoma. Following the attack, she lost her sight completely. Despite five surgeries, the doctors could not restore her sight and in 2003, after she developed an infection, she chose to have both eyes removed because of the pain.

Through it all, Nodrat persevered. She will receive her associate degree at the end of this semester and will go on for a bachelor's degree in human services at City Tech. She then plans to earn master's and doctoral degrees from Hunter College to prepare for a career as a clinical psychologist. She feels her strong knowledge of computers and technologies for the visually impaired will prove to be very useful in her chosen profession. Her children, now 25 and 22 years old, have done well academically and have made Nodrat proud.

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“I’ll be walking the marathon course this time,” she says, “because my schedule is too busy to make time for running training.” Not only is Nodrat a full-time college student, she has mentored other students and has worked as a volunteer at the Catholic Guild for the Blind and the Jewish Guild for the Blind, offering English as a Second Language training to blind students.

As president of the National Federation of the Blind's New York Student Division, she helps blind high school and college students navigate the higher education system. The group's mission is to help blind students understand their rights, help them achieve their goals, and realize and maximize their potential.

“I’ve contacted 15 colleges and am working with the heads of their disability offices to develop strategies so that we can pursue programs to help disabled students,” she explains. “One person alone can’t achieve very much. But many voices together can make a difference. I’m hoping to maintain my energy, strength and commitment so I can set a good example for other blind individuals and represent my constituents and all members of the National Federation for the Blind.”

In addition, she is trying to create a foundation to help blind women and children in Afghanistan. “My job is to raise my voice,” she says. “I hope to encourage sighted people to join the struggle -- to support organizations that help women and the disabled.”

She is also an active member of the Women’s Association of New York. A resident of Long Island City, she was a volunteer in the Department of Music Therapy at the Queens Center for Progress. In her "spare time," she enjoys karate (as an advanced yellow belt), yoga, music, writing short stories and ceramics.

Nodrat has received awards and scholarships in recognition of her activism and academic achievements from the National Federation of the Blind, the American Council of the Blind and the New York City Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, among others. In 2006, she received a Benjamin H. Namm Scholarship from City Tech. Despite a jam-packed schedule, she has maintained a 3.7 (out of 4.0) grade point average in her studies.

“I think I’ve chosen the right field,” she says about her decision to become a clinical psychologist. “A person who has known hardship, as I have, is in a good position to help others who are struggling to make sense of their lives.”

Nodrat’s guide dog, Yahoo, a black Labrador named after the Internet company that sponsored his training, changed Nodrat’s life, she says. “Yahoo is my ultimate eyes and I am very fortunate to have him in my life. For the past four years, he has allowed me to move through the world with more confidence. He was trained by Guiding Eyes for the Blind, a wonderful dog training school.”

She expresses deep gratitude to other organizations that have helped along the way, including, the Commission for the Blind, The Lighthouse International Center for the Blind, the Catholic Guild for the Blind, the Jewish Guild for the Blind, Recording for the Blind, The Hadley School for the Blind, The Library for the Blind, the American Foundation for the Blind, Vision Self Manner, Daniel's Music Foundation and the Achilles Track Club (which helps athletes with disabilities compete in sports activities).

Last, but not least, she thanks City Tech, which supports more than 30 students with varying degrees of visual disabilities, particularly the human services department and the student support office. Through her major, she has undertaken internships at Goodwill Industries' Department of

Rehabilitation and Evaluation Services and Citiview Connections, which have provided valuable training.

As the marathon approaches, Nodrat is looking forward to the challenge. "Last year, I finished in seven hours and 15 minutes. This year, if I can make it in six and a half hours, I'll consider it a great victory. I want to say to the world, if Afghan women have the chance, they can do great things. If I can be an example for them, it would be an honor for me."

The largest public college of technology in New York State, New York City College of Technology of The City University of New York enrolls more than 13,000 students in 57 baccalaureate, associate and specialized certificate programs. Located at 300 Jay Street in Downtown Brooklyn, City Tech is at the MetroTech Center academic and commercial complex, convenient to public transportation.