

Mark Wollmershauser ... a Man of Many Talents

Late last year, the Special Olympics Oklahoma staff began seeing a lot of Mark Wollmershauser. We'd walk down the hall and there he'd be with a paint can in one hand and a paint brush in the other. A few days later, we'd hear sounds of hammering or drilling. Mark was on a mission to get this place in order! He had retired from 25 years as a Tulsa Police Officer and was offering us his handyman skills on a volunteer basis. What a gift!

In just a few months, he whipped this place into shape. Repair projects that had been neglected for quite some time were now all getting his attention. The largest project he has tackled involved a Boy Scout working toward his Eagle Badge. They renovated the Special Olympics Oklahoma storage room and transformed it into a well-organized, usable space.

Mark is a one man show—handyman; jack-of-all-trades; former police officer; Oklahoma Law Enforcement Torch Run Executive Director; husband to Peggy; father to Mark Jr., Tulsa Police Officer; father to Amy, Special Olympics Athlete; Bocce Venue Director; Coach; Volunteer; and our FRIEND!

Years ago when Mark's daughter, Amy was in the 7th Grade, Mark and Peggy moved into the Union School district. With trepidation, they allowed Amy to go away to Special Olympics Summer Games for the first time. In fact, it was the first time she had been away from them in their lives. "Peggy knew more about Special Olympics than I did," Mark admits. "I just knew she was going with a teacher that Peggy knew well. She was going to compete in Speed Walking and Softball Throw. When Amy came home from that experience, it changed her life...and ours."

"She came home beaming," Mark says with a smile. "She couldn't quit talking about the fun she'd had. She talked and talked and talked about the people she had met there, the coaches, the fun, the dance and the competition."

The following year Mark was late in getting to Stillwater to watch Amy participate in the Summer Games competitions. When Mark arrived, something happened to him that has become the point in time that he reflects upon as why he is still involved with Special Olympics today.

"I got to Amy's Track and Field event late. When I hurriedly approached the track, the 50-meter wheelchair race for boys was about to start. As three athletes in wheelchairs started down the track facing forward, the fourth athlete, who had no mobility in either arm or one leg, took his only good leg, turned his chair around



backwards and with one foot pushed himself to the finish line," Mark reminisces. "It took him 5 minutes 32

seconds for him to go 50 meters. I remember that time because they announced it over the loud speaker when he crossed the finish line. People filled the stands that day. They were on their feet cheering and clapping and jumping up and down. That athlete worked so hard and the look on his face was as if he had run the Boston Marathon." One can tell by the

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passion in Mark's voice that this experience was a pivotal moment in his life.

"Amy, my daughter competed later and I was thoroughly amazed with her ability to speed walk. She taught herself, and I didn't know she could do that," Mark states with humility and pride. "But, that young athlete's determination at the 50 meter wheelchair race solidified my resolve to be involved in Special Olympics to this day."

*Mark Wollmershauser . . .
a Man of Many Talents (continued)*

Mark continued to be a spectator at Special Olympics events. He eventually became the Honor Guard coordinator for the Tulsa Police Department. "I picked six officers to go with me as the Honor Guard at Summer Games Opening Ceremonies. After rehearsal at 3:30 p.m., they all left to go to the Law Enforcement Torch Run Dinner. They had left their patrol cars on the field and when they returned there were 2,000 athletes swarming around their police cars. They said they had never been asked by so many people for their photo and autographs," Mark says. "They loved it! These guys were hooked. The next year when we asked for six volunteers, nineteen hands went up. We've been going to Opening Ceremonies ever since."



Mark & Amy winning gold medals for Unified Bocce at 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in China.

Over the years, 20 years in fact, Mark continues to give tirelessly to Special Olympics Oklahoma. He is most proud, though, of his involvement in the International Law Enforcement Torch Run Conference in 2007, which was held in Oklahoma for the first time.

"Conference attendees are still talking about the conference in Oklahoma. We set the benchmark for all International Law Enforcement Torch Run Conferences in the future," Mark states with pride and conviction. "When conference attendees landed at the airport, they were greeted by 24 athletes at the baggage claim area. This had never been done before. Attendees were so impressed that they stopped and opened their luggage and started handing out T-shirts and pins to the athletes. But, the athlete involvement didn't stop there. We had athletes on every bus to answer ques-

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tions and show a DVD about the conference. Then at the hotel, more athletes greeted the attendees at every door. Instead of officers, athletes acted as tour guides. It was incredible."

"To this day I hear from officers all over the world that this conference was so much fun because of the athletes' involvement," Mark says.

Prior to Mark retiring from the Tulsa Police Department in February 2009, he served on the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Torch Run Executive Committee and served as the Assistant Director in 2008. In January 2010, he was elected as the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Torch Run Executive Committee.

Has his workload changed since he retired? He will admit it takes a few more hours because he spends time working with the Law Enforcement Torch Run throughout the state. He made a commitment to Special Olympics to raise Law Enforcement Torch Run fundraising efforts by 20 percent a year. He and the committee are on the way to achieving that goal with an increase of 21 percent for the Polar Plunge this year and a multitude of other fundraising efforts planned throughout the year and across the state.

Mark is a multi-faceted individual, and he shines just as a diamond shines in many directions. "This is a passion I have for right now," Mark says.

Right now seems to have spanned 20 plus years!

"It is helpful to have a wife who supports what I do," Mark says. "I am very proud of my family, and I'm extremely thankful for that young Special Olympics athlete who persevered to make it to the finish line so many years ago."



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