

Seniors strut their stuff in Olympics



Katherine Polenz shows her prize-winning form as a participant in the table tennis competition at the recent Senior Olympics.

By Tom Boer
staff writer

Senior citizens are said to be living their golden years. But to Betty VanDorpe, one of many active Farmington-area seniors, the mention of gold brings to mind athletic trophies won, not years lived.

VanDorpe, representing the Mercy Center, went for the gold — and won — Sunday at the fourth annual Senior Olympics at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

One of 690 seniors aged 60 to 92 to participate in the meet, VanDorpe earned her gold medal in table tennis.

"You can tell we're old, we still call it Ping Pong," said VanDorpe with a laugh during a gathering of Mercy Center's athletes Monday. "I almost didn't enter because I didn't see Ping Pong listed."

Her husband, Roger, was a member of Mercy Center's volleyball team, which finished second at the olympics. Another Mercy Center team earned a third place in the volleyball competition.

"It was tiring," said Roger VanDorpe. "We had to play five matches. We started at 10:30 in the morning and didn't finish up until 4:30 in the afternoon."

All told, 81 seniors from Mercy Center entered the olympics.

"And we did it well," said Roger VanDorpe. "We had about 60 people and maybe half of them earned medals."

SENIORS COMPETED in events like the 50- and 100-yard dashes, tennis (best of three sets), mile run, mile walk, putting, Frisbee toss, softball pitch, hit and run, bocce (lawn bowling), swimming and diving, shuffle board, backgammon, horseshoe pitching.

For the more sedate, there was a baking contest.

The meet, co-sponsored by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan and the Michigan Recreation and Park Association, was run by 150 volunteers from parks and recreation departments in southeast Michigan.

"The purpose (of the olympics) is to foster the awareness that senior citizens have the potential to participate in athletic activities as well as the more passive ones," said Dan Stencil of the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Department, which supplied some of the equipment and personnel used.

"It gives them (the seniors) a sense of achievement and self esteem," Stencil said.

Mary Miller, who sits on the Older Persons Commission in the Rochester area, added: "We're all geared up for the healthy longevity through nutrition and exercise. But older people have to learn about this, and events like this are excellent teachers."

If age is no handicap, then neither are infirmities to some athletes. Mercy Center's Angie Tucker, who is legally blind, won the mile walk event, and teammate Stan Flot participated in swimming and volleyball despite having only one leg.

ANOTHER GOLDEN boy from the Mercy Center was John Petricca, who won the bocce (lawn bowling) medal. He learned to play the game in the Italian neighborhood where he grew up in Uniontown, Pa.

"I really didn't practice," he said. "I haven't played for about 30 years."

Leola Rammel of the Mercy Center team had won the mile walk for the past three years, but finished fourth this year.

"I tried to bowl this year and hurt my leg," she explained. "And we had suffer competition in the event this year."

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Frisbee tossing has become something of a rage among senior citizens. Leola Rammel has taken advantage of the game's popularity by starring in the recent Senior Olympics.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer



Baking and bouncing

Different strokes for different folks is the byword at the Senior Olympics. While some persons, such as Ken Hill and Roger Van Dorpe (at left), went in for the more strenuous activities, other entrants went in for more subtle activities, such as cooking and baking. This was the case for (above, from left) Florence Nissle, Edith Gurizle and Stella Murphy.

AN INVITATION



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