

Gold medal effort



Mike Todorov, who usually moves the heavy equipment, helps steady the balance beam by sitting on the end.



photos by SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Heather Glysson (left) of Farmington and Shannon Morrison (right) of Livonia warm up under Sue Kissinger's supervision.

Special Olympic coaches tops in county

By Casey Hens
staff writer

A SPECIAL kind of athletic program brings a sense of pride to students in Sue Kissinger's and Mike Todorov's classrooms at Farmington High School.

As special education teachers and Special Olympic coaches in the Farmington Public Schools, they see increased teamwork, self-esteem and students who get along much better. Both teach in the South Oakland Skill Center, a county center program based at Farmington High where about 40 high school-age students with a wide range of impairments learn how to live productive lives.

Students attend the SOSOC from throughout Oakland County and most participate in one or more of a dozen Special Olympics sports offered through the all-volunteer Farmington program.

Todorov said coaching the year-round sports program allows students to see him in a different light. They also see another side of each other in the classroom.

The carryover (into the classroom) is incredible," he said. "They look at you not just as a teacher, but as a coach too."

"I'd like to see the program continue to grow and build at the other end — maybe they can be coaches themselves. This thing has evolved — we're just waiting to see where it will go next."

THE TWO TEACHERS were recently named the 1992 Outstanding Coaches by Oakland County Special Olympics because of the extensive program they have built here in Farmington. It is the first time two coaches have received the award together.

"It's probably the premier program in the state," added Gary Gaffner, a special education principal for the Farmington district and the president of Michigan Special Olympics. "They are really outstanding. They work well together."

Special Olympics has grown up with other special education programs, where an effort is now made to keep students mixing with their peers in school as much as possible. Kissinger said the Special Olympics program has grown from the original "field day" of events with about 15 kids, where the rules were bent because of the participants' impairments.

"I can remember running a track meet back in the 1970s ... with a budget of \$100," Gaffner added.

Today, Special Olympic athletes everywhere follow the same rules as all athletes, go through eight weeks of training for their sport, and even compete at Farmington High with some intramural teams. Some special athletes also play on regular school teams.

"The level of competition has just completely gone from a playground kind of thing to real sophisticated competition," Gaffner added.

ABOUT 180 students from throughout the district, ranging from ages eight to 26, participate in the Special Olympics, including the 40 who attend SOSOC at Farmington High. An alumni chapter of Special Olympics keeps graduates active in all types of athletics, and keeps parents involved as well.

"Parents have really bought into it," Gaffner added. "They've become very proud of their kids. Historically, that wasn't really the case."

The program "has been wonderful," Kissinger added. "We've had so much support. The school has been so accepting of the kids."

Several years ago, Farmington High was one of the first schools in the country to award varsity letters to Special Olympians, and a number of students now proudly wear letter jackets.

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

● RING STOLEN

A woman's diamond ring valued at \$1,000 was reported stolen by a customer at Kohl's department store, 30150 Grand River, according to a Farmington Hills police report. A 54-year-old employee at the jewelry counter told police she was showing a man a ring he said he wanted to buy for his girlfriend. The man then grabbed the ring and ran out of the east door of the store, police said.

While outside of the store, a 25-year-old Livonia man who was

southbound along the shopping plaza, saw the man get into what is believed to be a 1976 Oldsmobile. The Livonia man followed the car through the lot and left onto Nine Mile, according to police.

The black man is described as 25-30 years old, 6 feet-3 inches tall and 220 pounds. The ring had two rows of diamonds, according to the report.

● THEFTS REPORTED

Approximately \$3,500 cash, a television, VCR, 400 CDs, 25 video tapes, telefacsimile machine, copy machine and jewelry valued at \$25,425 were reported stolen from a house on Robinson, Feb. 29-March 1.

A color television, VCR, four rings, earrings and two necklaces

valued at \$6,975, were reported stolen from a house on Inkster, March 1.

A cashmere jacket valued at \$1,200 was reported stolen from a waiting room in an office at 30500 Northwestern Highway, Feb. 28.

A back massager, two home thermostats and a telefacsimile machine valued at \$1,329 were reported stolen from a storage shed at Len Nelson Associates, 27600 Farmington, Feb. 24-28.

Approximately \$500 cash was reported stolen from the purse of a school bus driver, Feb. 27.

Two tape decks valued at \$1,000 were reported stolen from a 1990 Jeep at Perfect Life, 31225 Orchard Lake Road, Feb. 29.

military news

If you have military news with a Farmington area connection, send it to: Military News, Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

● COMMANDANT'S LIST

Cadet Mark Mitchell of Farmington has been placed on the Commandant's List for military excellence at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colo.

To be named to the list, cadets must have a 3.0 or greater military performance average at the end of the spring or fall semester.

Mitchell is a 1990 graduate of Farmington High School.



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

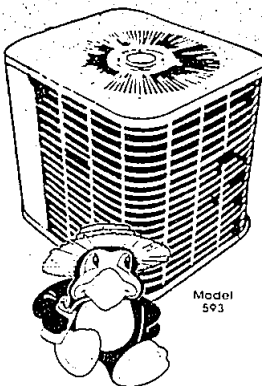
A taxing encounter

Iris and John Millitello of Farmington Hills got their income taxes prepared for free by Ken Milliken (left) of the American Association of Retired Persons at the Mercy Center. The AARP provided tax help to 607 senior

citizens this year, said John Antonilli, another preparer. "I enjoy helping people and I like working with figures," he says. Preparers are trained by the IRS.

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