

SUBURBAN LIFE

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THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 1994



JOE DEREK

Special folks face challenges

A special time, a special place, and a special friend. For those of you who know me, I would assume that many of you would feel that first line means that I was out in the spring of the year in a favorite swamp with a lizard on my shoulder. You know the type: kind of creepy, crawly, and scaly; moves nervously about; your parents wouldn't think of letting it in the house, and you are sure at one time or another it had to eat bugs. O.K. Enough of the humor. This column has nothing to do with me.

A couple of times in the last 14 months or so, I have had the extreme pleasure of working with Team Farmington of the Special Olympics. I challenge any of you to work with these coaches, parents, and athletes, and see if your perspective on life doesn't change. My, my, my, how many of us so-called normal people take life for granted. Except for luck, or whatever you want to call it, any of us could be a special athlete.

Athletes teach lessons

Count your lucky stars that every day that you are awake you do not have to experience the challenges these very special people have to take on. But they do, and they try to do the very best they can. Boy, could a lot of you out there take a lesson from these special athletes.

How many of you out there whine and wimp your days, weeks, and years away just because life does not always go your way? Sometimes I feel overwhelmed with how many of today's American crybabies complain nonstop about their so-called rights, and I use the term loosely, and how the world owes them something.

How pathetic! I suggest some of you walk a mile in the shoes of a special olympian and see what a real challenge is.

The special time I am speaking of was the Second Annual Earth Day Festival, which was held on April 16 and 17 in the city of Farmington Hills. The special place is, of course, Heritage Park, which is one of the jewels of our city. The special friend is not one person, but a young man, a young lady, and a young tree.

A special person

A tribute was paid to a special olympian, Steve Rohrhaft, who passed away in the last year. A ceremony was held at the Earth Festival and a white pine, the official state tree of Michigan, was planted in his name as a tribute to his life as a member of Team Farmington.

Steve's memory will live on in that special tree to remind us of what he meant to his parents, coaches, and teammates. I watched a video of Steve last month at a winter games awards ceremony as he stood at the "Power of Love," which I am told was his favorite song.

His fellow olympians put the video together to honor him. I am told by his coaches, Todd Lipa and Mike Todoroff, that Steve would compete even though his lips and fingers would turn blue. He gave it his very best, and that's all we should ever expect from anyone.

On Saturday, April 16, after the tree was planted and a ceremony was held and everyone walked away, a special athlete by the name of Christi Harrah walked out of the crowd back to the tree. Christi knew that Steve's spirit would live on in that special white pine, and she wanted to say one last goodbye.

She kissed her own hand and placed it on one of three branches. She spoke to that tree and looked up every now and then to the sky for a full minute or two.

Of course no one knew what she said, nor should we. It was a conversation between Christi and Steve. I watched the whole time, and believe me, it was not easy.

Touching moment

I saw her nod her head to the tree and then she walked over to hug coach Lipa. I do not think Hollywood could have written a more touching ending.

Yes, the last year or so has been an eye-opener for me. Team Farmington, win or lose, is a team nonetheless and proud of it. We should all be proud of its members. With them, it's not winning or losing, but how you play the game. America today could learn a valuable lesson from these athletes.

Black or white, fat or thin, short or tall, doesn't matter to them. What's important is that they all look out for and take care of each other. When they work together on Earth Day and care for each other and nature, I look at the rest of the so-called normal world and ask just what the heck is your excuse. They are the ones that hate it all together, and not us.

Indeed, a special time, a special place, and a special friend. We could all use a whole lot more of that.

Joe Derek is a Farmington Hills resident, naturalist, outdoor educator and host of the radio show "Naturally Michigan Afield."



Picture perfect: Members of the Farmington Arts Club, Suzanne Bauman of Bloomfield Hills; Billie Thompson of Livonia; Marjorie Chellstorp

Art flair

Artists show their true colors at exhibit



BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Members of the Farmington Club/Farmington Art Foundation spread their talent all over town from the elementary school art program to an expensive art class for senior citizens.

The club's biggest event of the year is the Farmington Artist Club exhibit at the Spicer House in Heritage Park May 12-17. The opening reception is 7-9 p.m. Thursday, May 12. The exhibit, a juried show exhibiting water colors, oils, pastels, collage, prints and mixed media, is open from noon to 8 p.m. May 13-17.

Styles range from realism to the abstract. Admission is free and most art entries are for sale. Art that is matted and unframed also will be available and reasonably priced.

"The wonderful thing about the club is that a lot of the artists started out as amateurs and have grown and are exhibiting nationally," said Marjorie Chellstorp, Farmington

Artist Club member.

"This is an opportunity for the public to experience fine art, painted and drawn by some of the best artists in Michigan," Chellstorp said. The artists are from Farmington, Livonia, Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Southfield, as well as other neighboring communities.

Varied teachers

"A lot of the artists are art teachers at area colleges and universities. Some do art consulting and are gallery members."

Along with the juried show, artists will exhibit framed paintings in a non-juried open show. In a juried show, the juror, chooses the best pieces to be exhibited and eliminates the others.

This year's juror is Theodore W. Vassar, an assistant art professor at Monroe County Community College and co-owner of Creekside Wildlife Art.

Last weekend, Vassar chose 110

pieces of art, from more than 200 entries, to be shown at the exhibit. He also named the prize winners for this year.

Jean Ozment of Farmington Hills won first place; Elisabeth Sylvester of Birmingham won second place; and Marcia Weigand of Northville won third place.

Honorable mentions went to Sylvester; Johnston, who won two honorable mentions; Jim Patterson of West Bloomfield; Lillian Langerman of Southfield; and Shirley Bishop of Livonia. Langerman also won the Grumbacher Color Award.

Meanwhile, throughout the year the Farmington Artists Club sponsors the Picture Lady program involving 19 schools, 17 in the Farmington area and two in Novi. The art portfolios that travel to the classrooms, with the assistance of volunteer mothers, include 520 prints.

Each portfolio, which teachers incorporate in classroom programs, has a theme, like animals or clowns.

"The idea is to expose the children to art," according to Annette Lind, president of the group for two years.

Creative seniors

On the other end of the spectrum, Farmington Arts Club members also

teach painting to senior citizens at Mercy Center. The seniors will have a separate showing area during the art exhibit.

"The goal was to promote art in a fledgling community," said Lind, a charter member who attended the first meeting in 1965 and has held every position, except president, twice.

"We have come from downtown to uptown. When we first started out one of the members had a friend who had a hobby shop and she conned him into letting us use it."

Club members displayed their work and on one Sunday afternoon members sold paintings.

Humble beginnings

When the hobby shop wasn't available the artists hung their work on chain link fences in the park, in gymnasiums and in libraries.

They've graduated to the Masonic Temple, banks, in store windows, at the Danish Inn and in churches.

Lind loves to tell the story of a man who came to an exhibit many years ago. He announced that he was looking for "peaceful" photos to hang in a nursing home.

See ARTISTS, 2C

Calligrapher pens her way to top art spot

Elaine M. Grohman was selected the 1994 Artist-in-Residence recently by the Farmington Area Arts Commission.

Grohman, a lifelong resident of the Farmington area, is a fine art calligrapher whose work has been exhibited internationally, most recently in an exhibit "USA/USRR Calligraphy." Her work can also be seen at various businesses around Farmington.

"I have been studying the art of calligraphy intensely for the past 12 years," Grohman said. "In that study, I have incorporated this ancient art form in a contemporary style. My goal has been to educate the public about the beauty inherent in the visual transmission of language."

She uses letter forms in two ways: One is the selection and use of lettering to enhance the meaning of text using dramatic colors and techniques; the second uses letters themselves as graphic elements, as a graphic symbol or image might be used.

"The current challenge faced by myself and other calligraphic artists is the need and desire to educate the public, as well as art galleries and other institutions to the beauty of calligraphy as an art form."



At work: Elaine M. Grohman, chosen artist in residence, practices her art. Her work has been exhibited internationally.

See CALLIGRAPHER, 2C

ANN HEALY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER