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A Rewarding Feeling

Jonathan H. Mayes
jonathanhm10@gmail.com

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Gahanna Lincoln High School

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1st Place

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A REWARDING FEELING



Photo credit: Gahanna Special Olympics Facebook page.

Gahanna Ohio-A rewarding feeling comes when somebody performs a great deed for someone or something. For Heather Turner, the reward comes when she helps coach Gahanna's very own Special Olympics Team. Turner said the reward comes from "Just seeing the joy and the excitement and all of the fun that they have, and seeing the achievements, and them doing things they've never done. It's unbelievable!"

Heather, a middle school special-ed teacher in the Gahanna school district, first joined the swim team as their head coach in 2011, after one of her former students joined the team and they were in the midst of searching for a new swimming coach. Since then,

she has also volunteered with the track team in the spring and summer, where she helps with the warmups/ stretches before events and meets.

The Special Olympics were founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver and has now spread to over 150 countries around the globe. There are more than 4.2 million athletes participating in different events, including athletes from Gahanna, Ohio.

Ever since becoming a coach for the Special Olympics, Turner said she has never had a sorrowful

moment, because she is working with the kids she loves. “ Two of my biggest passions in life are working with kids with different needs and different abilities on physical fitness and being a well rounded person. Being healthy, physically, mentally and socially, I just like having that complete picture.”

With success comes challenges, especially with trying to reach and help everyone in a single practice. Heather likes to be a very hands -on teacher to her athletes. She said that athletes should not experience many fears or challenges because of the environment. “It gives our athletes a chance to compete in something that is level, so that they’re competing with somebody that is at a similar level to them,”Turner said. “It’s also a very supportive environment, so it’s ok to take risks and it’s ok if you try it and mess up. They get a lot of support from coaches and volunteers, as well as all of the other athletes who are supportive and encouraging.”

Throughout her 3 years of coaching, there have been many impactful events that transpired, but two of them really stand out and have stuck in her mind. One of them she recalled was a boy who was in her class, that had not gotten involved in any

**“Let me win,
but if I cannot
win, let me be
brave in the
attempt.”**

-Motto of Special Olympics

extracurricular activities outside of the classroom until he got involved in track. “It has changed his life,” said Turner. “He loves it, he lives for it and it has given him something meaningful and social to be a part of, which he had never done before.” Turner would go on to recall an event that transpired at the first track meet she coached, where a young man who was blind, was able to run the entire track with just the assistance of a rope. She said that she was so



Heather Turner,
coach of Special
Olympics Track and
Swim Teams.
Photo credit: Gahanna
Special Olympics
Facebook page.

excited to see, no matter what the kids’ needs were, they could still participate fully in an event.

At the end of the day, Heather says the athletes are what makes her stay. “A lot of these kids are the same kids that I work with at school,” Turner said. “It’s my heart; it’s my whole heart; it’s my whole soul; I love it!”