

Anacortes' can-do Special Olympian

Story by KATHY BOYD / Skagit Valley Herald



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Anacortes Special Olympics coach Laurie Sherman (left) and Darcy Storme, a Special Olympics athlete, share a moment in the Anacortes Eagles Hall, where Storme held a fundraiser for her team.

Anacortes Eagles member Darcy Storme isn't your typical volunteer.

Not everyone can organize a dinner of 80 pounds of roast pork, with all the trimmings and homemade apple pie, with such ease. It takes the skills, concentration and stamina of, well, an athlete — a perfect challenge for Storme.

After all, she's an award-winning Special Olympics athlete, with a can-do attitude and the kind of enthusiasm that's infectious, friends say.

And as far as they're concerned, there's nothing disabled about her.

"She has a Swiss-watch brain; she never forgets anything," said Laurie Sherman, Storme's Special Olympics coach.

Storme organized a big dinner in January to raise about \$750 to help Special Olympics athletes with equipment and travel expenses.

For the past eight years, Storme — who serves up food and conversation every Tuesday and Wednesday at the Eagles Hall — has partnered with friends at the club, her family, Special Olympics teammates and Sherman to sponsor the annual fundraising dinner.

Sherman said Storme does everything, from planning the menu to recruiting volunteer help. She even makes the deep dish apple pie, a skill she learned from her mom and grandmother.

"Trust me. It's a lot of work," Storme said, nodding her head knowingly. That was especially true during January's dinner, when the hall quickly filled up — and they ran out of meat.

"This place was packed," Sherman said.

But Storme didn't seem to suffer any performance anxiety. As a seasoned Special Olympic athlete, she's familiar with pressure.

Storme, 41, joined Special Olympics some 25 years ago and chose it as her charity when she became an Eagles member a few years later. She's since raised thousands of dollars for her cause.

One year, Sherman said, Storme baked cookies to sell each week at the Eagles meetings and managed a silent auction during the annual fundraising dinner. She also made a quilt and raffled it off. Storme won an award for raising the most money for Special Olympics that year, Sherman said.

Storme is well-known in the Anacortes community through her activities with the American Legion, a quilting club, Relay for Life and the Kiwanis-sponsored Aktion Club, an electronics recycling club for less-able people led by Ed Gegen, coordinator and basketball coach for Special Olympics in Anacortes.

Storme also volunteers at Buer's Anacortes Floral shop, answering the phone and greeting customers for owner Eloise Hammer.

Not only is Storme known as an avid volunteer, she's a winning athlete. Her Special Olympics soccer team won a gold medal at the state tournament in June 2010 at Joint Base Lewis McChord near Tacoma.

"We were playing soccer," Storme said. "It was fun and we had a good time. We got gold!" she added, smiling proudly.

Sherman, who has been a Special Olympics coach for more than a decade, said special athletes — Storme in particular — have a lot of ability and shouldn't be underestimated.

"I met her 12 years ago ... it was the first time I had coached and the first soccer team for Fidalgo Special Olympics," Sherman said. "Lucky for me, Storme became my 'secretary,' helping to remind me of upcoming dates and responsibilities for our team. She pays attention to the calendar and manages her time well."



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Special Olympics athlete Darcy Storme visits with some regular patrons in the Anacortes Eagles Hall, where Storme held a recent fundraiser for her team.

Gegen has known Storme since he signed on as a volunteer 22 years ago. He said she was involved in bowling, basketball, swimming and soccer, worked three jobs and was “volunteering all over the place.”

“She does a little of everything,” he said. “Storme is a wonderful person.”

Gegen is not only a staunch advocate for Storme, but for Special Olympics in general. And though public support of Special Olympics activities and events has increased, he believes people still don’t realize how much the disabled can contribute to their communities.

“People with other abilities are more normal than they are disabled,” he said. “We all have disabilities of one type or another. When you work around people with disabilities, you learn what they can do. They have many more abilities than we give them credit for — such as in art or math.”

Gegen, co-owner of the Mount Vernon Building Center, said about 35 athletes in Anacortes participate in year-round Special Olympics sports — soccer, swimming, bowling or track and field. Anyone who has a disability that limits their involvement in regular sports is eligible to participate, he said.

Every town in Skagit County has a team, Sherman said. And many of those athletes look forward to the annual state summer games in June in Tacoma.

To help all the athletes prepare and make the games a positive experience, Gegen said all the teams need volunteers and funding. Gegen said he

likes to recruit teenage athletes to help with the training.

“I always try to get high school students to volunteer,” he said, explaining that they don’t quit when they graduate. “They always stay on.”

And many, especially the Special Olympics team members, always help with Storme’s dinners, meeting and greeting the diners, Gegen said. So, in that way, Storme is responsible not only for contributions to Special Olympics, but for making the community more aware of “the abilities of our citizens with disabilities.”

“Without Storme’s willingness to put on these dinners, some would never have the privilege of meeting our athletes,” Gegen said. “Storme is a remarkable young lady who has proven that disabilities do not make us disabled.”



Submitted photo

Darcy Storme (lower right) and her Anacortes soccer teammates celebrate winning the gold medal at the Special Olympics in June 2010 at Fort Lewis.