

## Steve Owens started out in Special Olympics; now he's an instructor planning a future on the water



The Enquirer/Michael E. Keating

Steve Owens, who struggled with ADHD, is a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the Gamble-Nippert YMCA. He teaches in the adaptive program geared to autistic students. He plans to join the Coast Guard and become a marine biologist.

## Coach knows special needs

By Paul Clark  
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**WESTWOOD** – The Special Olympics swim team at Gamble-Nippert YMCA in Westwood can't say the coach is wet behind the ears.

Steve Owens is only 17, but before he became coach he dominated swim competitions in the Hamilton County Special Olympics, starting in second grade and for eight years afterward.

"I used to swim with them," he says of his team. "I like them, and they know me."

"He excelled in that program," says Gamble-Nippert aquatics director Ann Lofton. "He eventually swam on our regular Y competitive team."

The Dater High School se-

### Instruction available

The adaptive swim program for special-needs students offers one-on-one instruction Mondays 3-4:30 p.m. at the Gamble-Nippert YMCA, 3159 Montana Ave., Westwood. For information, call Ann Lofton at 513-661-1105.

nor got his feet wet as a child in the Gamble-Nippert adaptive program, a special-needs instructional swim course.

That program, free of charge and developed by 40-year Y employee Mary Dolan, is geared toward autistic students but accepts others with special needs – like Steve, who struggled with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

"If someone with a special need comes to us, we don't turn kids away," Lofton says.

Two years ago, Steve joined Gamble-Nippert as a lifeguard

trainee. Now, he works as a lifeguard there and as an instructor with the adaptive program that gave him his start as a swimmer.

"I just like teaching people how to swim," he says. "It's always good to learn."

His supervisors say he's learned well.

"He does an excellent job," Lofton said. "He's always on it when it comes to guarding the pool. He's very focused on safety which is exactly what we need."

And he does with authority.

"Steven has no trouble blowing his whistle," Lofton says.

Says Steve: "We've had some close calls with parents not watching their kids around the deep end."

Steve lives in Green Township with his parents, Tia and Larry Owens. He's completed training as a scuba diver, has swum with manatees in Florida, and his plans after high school won't take him far from the water.

"First I want try to go to the Coast Guard," Steve says, "and then go to college to become a marine biologist. I'd like to work at Sea World, and then teach physics and chemistry."

He has a start on that last goal.

"He gets a little chemistry here," Lofton says. "Chlorine and pH."

## Dedicated to doing good for dogs

By Mark Hansel  
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If a dog is man's best friend, then it would be fair to say Millie Faust is a dog's best friend.

The 77-year-old retired bank worker is a volunteer at the Campbell County Animal Shelter.

Faust started out volunteering at the SPCA in Cincinnati in 1994. Shortly after, she heard that the Campbell County Animal Shelter, which is closer to her home in Wilder, was looking for help and she began volunteering there.

For several years Faust was involved in pet therapy – taking dogs to nursing homes to provide companionship for the elderly – but now she works out of the shelter office on Poplar Ridge Road in Melbourne.

"She is the greatest and we love her," said Lisa Bowman, the shelter director. "She does everything from answering the phones to taking care of the animals to waiting on customers."

Faust has also earned the designation of "laundry queen," which she admits is a dirty job that she doesn't mind doing.

A few years ago, there was a staffing shortage and at one point it was just Bowman, Faust and one other employee.

"She really came through for



The Enquirer/Patrick Reddy

Millie Faust, a volunteer at the Campbell County Animal Shelter, with Duckie, a rescued dog who lives there.

us then," Bowman said.

Faust, who is widowed, said her two sons think it's great that she volunteers at the shelter because it lets her get out of the house and stay active.

A lot of pets come through the shelter, but every once in a while, Faust says, a very special

one comes along.

When Duckie came in a few years ago, he was in a bad way and the staff was not sure he would survive. He had been kept in a crate and was severely malnourished.

"He looked like a skeleton and he had webbed feet," Faust

### About the shelter

**What:** Campbell County Animal Shelter.

**When:** 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday.

**Where:** 1989 Poplar Ridge Road, Melbourne.

**Information:** To adopt a pet or to become a volunteer, call 859-635-2819 or visit [www.campbellcountyky.org/home/services/animal-shelter](http://www.campbellcountyky.org/home/services/animal-shelter)

said. "That's how he got the name."

With a lot of care and some good fortune, Duckie made a full recovery and now lives at the shelter. Faust says people want to adopt him sometimes, but he is not going anywhere.

Not all of the pets that come in are as lucky as Duckie, and Faust said that can make the job very difficult.

"That's why I come in at 10:30," she says. "They do that job early in the morning and if I don't see a pet that was here the day before, I like to think they were adopted."

Faust volunteers two days a week and says she plans to be there as long as they will have her. Bowman says Faust, like Duckie, is not going anywhere.

## Getting things done for the team

### Kini Wright supports junior RBI baseball

By John Erardi  
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**ROSELAWN** – Kini Wright is one of the unsung heroes of Cincinnati's junior division RBI baseball team that in July played its way into the World Series in Jupiter, Fla.

On road trips, she washed uniforms, made lunches and dinners, sewed patches – whatever it took – to keep a group of 15-and-under boys in the game.

And if you know Kini Wright, you know that plenty of tender loving care comes along with it.

"If I couldn't do it, I'd hope somebody would do it for mine," Wright says.

Her life is one of ironies.

One cannot tell the Roselawn woman's story without introducing her husband, Macky, and their sons, Andrew Clim and Alex, who both play baseball, and their daughter, Ashley, who plays everything but, including piano.

Alex's team is RBI, part of Major League Baseball's effort to promote the game and encourage kids to stay in school. There are baseball and girls' softball teams in more than 200 cities.

African-Americans players – a lifeblood for the game since the early 1950s – began drifting away from the sport in the early 1990s, drawn by the faster action of football and basketball.

And, yet, Andrew, 26, and Alex, 15, weren't called by baseball, they called to it.

That is Irony No. 1.

Irony No. 2 is that Andrew tried to recruit Ashley to softball but she wanted no part. She feels her brothers are consumed by baseball. One cannot have a family without a little conflict, good-natured or otherwise.

Irony No. 3 is that Wright grew up among six siblings in Kennedy Heights, and was not an athlete.

Yet she has been immersed in sports for 22 years now.

The Cincinnati junior RBIs are a diverse group of youngsters, even from a socio-economic standpoint.

The phrase for which RBI stands – "Reviving Baseball in the Inner Cities" – is the only thing Wright doesn't like about the program.

"It sounds like a charity case," she says. "What we are is a bunch of good baseball players."

But she understands the initiative behind the program, and supports it.

Alex was taught the finer points of baseball by Andrew, who is 11 years older and still plays organized baseball at age 26. Andrew played center field at Moeller High School (2002 graduate) as does Alex, a sophomore.

Things have a way of getting done when people like Kini Wright are involved.

Mike Collins – "Coach Mike" as he's known – is the manager of the Cincinnati juniors' RBI team. He tells stories of Wright washing uniforms from western Kentucky to central Indiana, to packing lunches of sloppy joes and pickles, and making dinners of chicken wings and string beans and pans of homemade macaroni-and-cheese.

Wright wasn't the only one pitching in but she was always the ringleader.

"She's a giver," Collins says. "And she does what givers do. They give, and then they give some more. They aren't looking at the other person and asking, 'What about you?'"

The Cincinnati juniors didn't win any games in Florida, but the experience was more than worth it, says Wright, who found herself – for maybe the first time – with not quite enough to do. This time, the organizers had taken care of most of it.

"The air travel, the competition, the staying together and playing together and working together to achieve a common goal, these are things these young men will remember for the rest of their lives," she says.

And the players will remember "Mrs. Wright" for the rest of their lives, too, Collins says.

"One of a kind," he says.



The Enquirer/Amanda Davidson

Kini Wright of Roselawn has grown into the role of being a "team mother" for a Reviving Baseball in the Inner Cities (RBI) team.

## 5 friends from St. X the driving force behind charity for kids

### Golfers hitting the links for Make-A-Wish

By Leah Zipperstein  
 Enquirer contributor

Hoping to bridge their passion for golf with an interest to give back to the local community, five friends from St. Xavier High School have created the Cincinnati Golfers for Charity.

The goal is to enrich the lives of children and raise awareness of local charities.

The five are Matt Olson of Mount Lookout, Dave Gero of Mason, Mike Stagnaro of Hyde Park, Pete Kopf of

Hyde Park and Dan Ryan of Columbia Tusculum.

"A few of us had been playing in the 100 Hole Golf Challenge for Make-A-Wish, but at the end of 2007 they disbanded the event," Olson said. "Because my buddies wanted to continue, we decided to create our own nonprofit and run with the 100 Golf Challenge theme."

For the past three years during the first week of June, the CGC holds the annual event. The golfers arrive at the course at 5:30 in the

morning, tee off at 6, and then play for 12 straight hours. Upon finishing the 100 holes, they invite their spouses and beneficiaries for a dinner banquet at the golf course.

"It's tremendously fulfilling afterwards as we celebrate our accomplishments and get a chance to meet all the wish families," Olson said. "We give them the opportunity to talk about how the wishes have affected their family."

The first year they played at Walden Ponds Golf Club in

Hamilton, but the past two years, and already secured for next year, they will play at the Vineyard Golf Course in Anderson Township.

In 2008, their inaugural year, the group raised \$88,000, and raised \$82,000 a year later. This year, they raised more than \$115,000.

The event works like a walkathon. The 35 golfers get family and friends to pledge money for each hole they complete. "We all have a common goal and it's been incredibly well re-

ceived by our friends. Without their support, much of what we have done would not have been possible," Ryan said.

The money they raise from that single event is shared between Make-A-Wish and another local charity.

"Make-A-Wish has always been at the forefront, so we continue to benefit them and then have a selection process to benefit one or two other charities," Ryan said.

The first year, the charity

that benefited was the Kelly O'Leary Center for Autism Spectrum Disorder at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

In 2009, it was the Ohio Valley Chapter for Junior Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Kopf, a CGC board member, has a daughter with juvenile arthritis.

"I have seen this charity from both sides, and being one who has benefited from the charity personally it has really come full circle for me," Kopf said.