

CLUB CORNER

Edgewater Gymnastics Team in Panama City, Fla., Earned Money for Local Kids

Edgewater Gymnastics Academy in Panama City, Fla., helped its community by being involved with the "Back to School, End of Summer Fling," an event held at Pier Park in Panama City Beach to help the Bay County Rescue Mission provide school supplies and clothing for local children in need. Along with performing for the crowd, these gymnasts raised more than \$2,000 by gathering "Flip-A-Thon" pledges from family, friends and businesses. "It is so important for these young gymnasts to give back to our community... especially in these tough economic times," said Pam Kitchen, Head Coach and Owner of Edgewater Gymnastics Academy. ✕



Upstate Gymnastics Center: Pendleton, South Carolina Raises Money for American Cancer Society

Upstate Gymnastics Center's coach and owner Maureen Williamson teaches more than gymnastics at her club. Each spring, the girls' competitive team raises money for the American Cancer Society. Since 2001, this team of around 50 gymnasts, has taken part in the Relay for Life event and raised more than \$40,000. Congratulations to this club and its hard work to be involved in the community and help out a great cause -- the American Cancer Society.

For work on the Relay for Life, one of the 2009 captains Megan Jones received her high schools' community service award for graduating seniors and Williamson received the Pendleton-Clemson Volunteer of the Year Award from the American Cancer Society for 2009. ✕



CLUB CORNER

Incorporating Special Olympics into Group Gymnastics

By Luan Peszek

Cindy Bickman owns Chattooga Gymnastics in Marietta, Ga. Bickman has found a way to incorporate special needs children and Special Olympics into her gymnastics programs.

Bickman has 50 special needs students in her gym, most with mental disabilities and some with physical disabilities as well. Bickman's special needs children compete in Special Olympics and Gymnastics for All (GFA). In fact, Bickman has her class and team gymnasts join the special needs athletes and compete as unified partners at TeamGym competitions and GymFest group performances.

"Everyone lives in the same world in my gym," said Bickman. "I've been doing this for 25 years and my gym is a special and fun place. It makes everyone better."



Beginning with the 2009 season, the USA Gymnastics for All Committee revised the TeamGym rules so that Levels 1 and 2 would include opportunities for Athletes with Disabilities and/or Special Needs (ADSN) to compete along side or as unified partners with all of the other mainstream squads at those levels.

Bickman has organized members to participate as official USA Gymnastics delegation members at GFA events in Sweden, Portugal, and Austria. Her group is comprised of class and team students, special needs students, parents, and grandparents. The parents who attend the events also participate in all of the club's exhibitions. Bickman said, "The moms and a grandmother performed in our routine in Austria. When we came home from Austria, the dads asked to be involved!"

Bickman also took a group to Ft. Worth, Texas, in June for the International Sport and Cultural Festival. In fact, Bickman's unified squad earned Silver Medal status for Level 1 TeamGym squads. Chattooga's unified group also performed in the National GymFest, the Gymnastics for All program as well as the closing ceremonies with 900 people!

Bickman's club does competitive rhythmic gymnastics and aesthetic rhythmic group gymnastics. She tries to pull all of her students together as much as possible.

Although this could be a new revenue source for some clubs, Bickman said, "We don't charge our special needs students because we run this program through Special Olympics which is a volunteer-based organization. The program enriches the lives of the special needs students and it enriches the lives of my staff who work with them. I'm glad I'm able to do it."

CONTINUED ON P. 36

Incorporating Special Olympics into Group Gymnastics continued

One of Bickman's parents expressed concern about her special needs child participating outside of the Special Olympics setting. Bickman assured the mother these experiences would be good ones. After an event where there was a unified group performance, the mother said, "Look Cindy, my daughter is out there just like everybody else."

Bickman said, "We all have our challenges. It's gratifying to watch the special needs kids grow, develop and participate with the mainstream athletes at USA Gymnastics. It just shows each of us that we should be thankful for what we have!" ✧

