



Special Olympics *Massachusetts*

Someone You Should Know...

Athlete Profile: Elizabeth Taft



Elizabeth Taft receiving a medal at SOMA Senior Games.

There are not many women out there who will say their favorite food is, “Steak, and roast beef, and pork chops, and lamb chops, and hot dogs, and hamburgers.” But Elizabeth Taft will. Taft, 73, who currently lives in the New England Village in Pembroke has been participating in Special Olympics since 1987. Taft is a frequent participant and medal winner in the Special Olympics Massachusetts Senior Games, and has recently been selected to serve as a Global Messenger for Special Olympics Massachusetts. Taft not only excels at sports but her infectious spirit makes everyone around her feel as if they were her friend.

“Her biggest accomplishment is her ability to reach out to people and socialize with them,” Vienneau said. “Make them feel valued. When she walks up to you to say hello, it’s like you are the most important person in the world. She makes everyone in the Village

feel that way. She is really just a wonderful lady.”

Her friendly spirit and amusing stories catch the attention of everyone in the room, and make her a joy to be around. A couple years ago Taft traveled to the Senior Games with her best friend Rita Limauro and her coach Carol Vienneau. Upon arrival at the hotel Taft insisted the three of them rush down to the lobby. In the lobby Taft sat by the front door and greeted everyone that came in.

“She probably had the first names of 80% of the people that came in. She was like an ambassador,” Vienneau said.

Taft frequently tells those she meets of her childhood in Oxford when she lived in a fourteen room house with maids and housekeepers. At the age of sixteen Taft began attending and living at the Reinback Country Day School, where she spent the next twenty-three years. Taft currently lives with her best friend of over twenty years, Limauro, in New England Village, a residential home for adults with developmental disabilities. Taft moved to New England Village twenty years ago, and has been participating in Special Olympics ever since.

“There is something about her spirit,” Vienneau said. “It’s who she is. She keeps on going. Her friend Rita is the same way. Both of them are so wonderful and their friendship is so amazing. A lot of people don’t have that because they don’t know how to build that kind of friendship.”

Since her move to New England Village, Taft has been participating in Special Olympics Massachusetts. When she first started participating, Liz did a plethora of sports including swimming and even bowling. Now Liz specializes in race-walking and horseshoes.

“The best part is the exercise,” Taft said. “You learn how to do all the games and you meet a lot of nice people. I don’t know all of them, so it’s nice to meet them anyways.”

--contributed by Lauren Ebstein



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Last year was a comeback year for Taft, after recovering from a small heart attack. Taft was in the hospital because of some breathing issues when a stress test revealed she had had a minor heart attack. Doctors decided to transfer her up to a Boston hospital because they felt she might need a surgery. Taft was remarkable and stayed calm through the entire ordeal.

Because of the heart attack, Taft had to undergo surgery to put a stint in her heart. Taft was able to make her own decision about the surgery and whether or not to put the stint in, and was incredibly proud of herself because of that. Taft was awake during surgery and Vienneau was able to stay in the room and observe. Even during her surgery, Taft kept her spirits high and her sharp wit in tact.

“She kept saying she was so hungry,” Vienneau said. “The doctor kept asking what she would like to eat and Liz said M&Ms and beer. The doctor was laughing, beer for her means root beer. After the surgery the surgeon went to the vending machine and got M&Ms and root beer for her.”

After recovering from surgery, Taft was able to prepare and participate in the Senior Games in October. After receiving clearance from her doctor to participate in the games, Taft was also selected to say the Athlete Oath at the Senior Sports Classic.

“When she gave the oath for the opening ceremony she practiced so much,” Vienneau said. “She went right up there and said it perfectly.”

“I just got up there and took my time,” Taft said. “It was really nice.”

Taft cannot pin point one win that was the best for her, but those medals she won at her “comeback” Senior Games are pretty special to her. Taft keeps all of her medals in a bucket, and shows them to many of the people she talks to about Special Olympics. This past October, Taft participated in the Senior Games and garnered a bronze medal in race-walking and a gold medal in horseshoes.

“She was so proud of herself every time she got a medal,” Vienneau said. “I keep her picture on my desk because every time I look at it I think: that’s why I do Special Olympics. When you look at her face, she is so proud of herself. They all are. But to me, because I spent time with her, I know. That’s why I do SOMA.”

Liz and Rita attend Christmas celebrations at Vienneau’s house. Vienneau says each year when Taft and Limauro arrive at her house, Taft walks right up to the Christmas tree and begins singing to it, telling it how beautiful it is. Then she counts the presents. In addition to coaching Taft, Vienneau serves as a citizen buddy to Limauro, and for this reason they are both a part of her family.

“They never give up” Vienneau said. “They just never give up. It is just amazing.”

--contributed by Lauren Ebstein