



Helling devoted her life to making sports available to all with special needs

I am the track and field coach for the Stark Public Special Olympics. My athletes learn to have fun, challenge themselves, be gracious in competition and finish their race. They learn that winning isn't about a medal, but that special feeling in their heart. Finally, they know that I will always be at the finish line with open arms, regardless of the results.

I learned this from Ellen Helling, who this past week crossed the finish line of life.

Ellen's reward as she crossed her finish line was God awaiting with His arms open. The coordinator of SPSO, Ellen was SPSO, nurturing SPSO as if it were her own family. Ellen was a coach for every sport at one time or another. She made sure the group had money, kept the uniforms clean and repaired, and maintained a sense of pride for our program.

Ellen's life quest was to make sports available to all special-needs individuals without regard to disability or cost. It was her passion, and with her passion was a heart whose boundaries were endless. She instilled in all of us that the one true reward in coaching is the opportunity to be a positive and meaningful influence in the lives of our athletes as they grow up.

On March 10, we will have our second annual SPSO fundraiser. The goal of raising money aside, our evening will now be a celebration of Ellen Helling's life, not only with us but also within us. Regardless of your affiliation with the special-needs community, please join us.

When you see an SPSO athlete, say a little prayer of thanks for Ellen. When you see a young special-needs individual who could benefit from more in life, think of Ellen at the starting line with her arms open.

JAMES B. HEDRICK,

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