

## Local swimmer to compete at Special Olympics

By Jeff Doner

For the past 14 years, the Special Olympics have been a big part of King resident Maggie Cowles' life and she has proven to be no slouch in either of her sports - swimming and softball.

"I've been involved right from the start," said Maggie. "I really enjoy swimming because I'm part of a competitive team. The fun part is that when we have swim meets, we get involved with everything. Not only are we cheering if one of our teammates is in the water, but we cheer for all the different teams that are involved."

For someone who wasn't heavily involved in sports as a youngster, Maggie (who has a learning disability) has totally embraced sports and looks forward to her practices and games every week.

"We got her into swimming when she was quite young and she obviously enjoyed it, so that was really what got her going on the Special Olympics," said Maggie's mom Fiona. "After she went through all the levels with swimming and finished school, we didn't really know where it would go next and it was just by chance that we met somebody who said, 'let her try the Special Olympics.'" Maggie, now 38 and working two part-time jobs on top of her practices and games, has competed in numerous provincial competitions and has won her share of medals.

"I've done a lot of swimming and have won a lot of medals and ribbons. At a swim meet in Oshawa, I won a silver and two bronze and the medals they gave us were like the kind of medal an Olympian would get - very, very heavy," laughed Maggie.

So far, she has not been to a national or world Special Olympics, but said it's still a very important part of her life regardless.

"For me to compete in Special Olympics, it's great," Maggie explained. "I'm able to be part of a team and being part of a competitive swim team is just amazing."

In swimming, Maggie works hard in practice every Sunday at St. Andrew's College with the rest of the swim team.

"We were being timed last weekend and my coach Wendy said to me, 'you have improved since last year.' I'm getting stronger and stronger, walking every day, doing my own exercises."

With spring approaching, Maggie will soon turn her focus to softball as part of Newmarket Challengers team.

"Our team is just amazing," she said. "The nice thing about it is that it's challenging. It's always a really good game and our coach really gets us going."

But Maggie and her mom also think it's important to try to get the word out about the Special Olympics and how beneficial and enjoyable they are to some people.

"It's a pity the Special Olympics can't spread itself a little wider, because it's enormously helpful for people to have a go at good exercise," said Fiona. "Some of the people that swim with Maggie are well into their 40s and it's something that helps keep them going. It really sort of elevates quality of life and I think therefore it's an important thing."

"There are these opportunities with Special Olympics for people with disabilities to really get involved with doing something they can really get into and be active and enjoy, but finding out about it isn't always easy."

It is definitely a big part of Maggie's life and that was clear when she proudly recited the Special Olympics oath: "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

"I love it. I just absolutely love it."