

LAPPEER

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Living

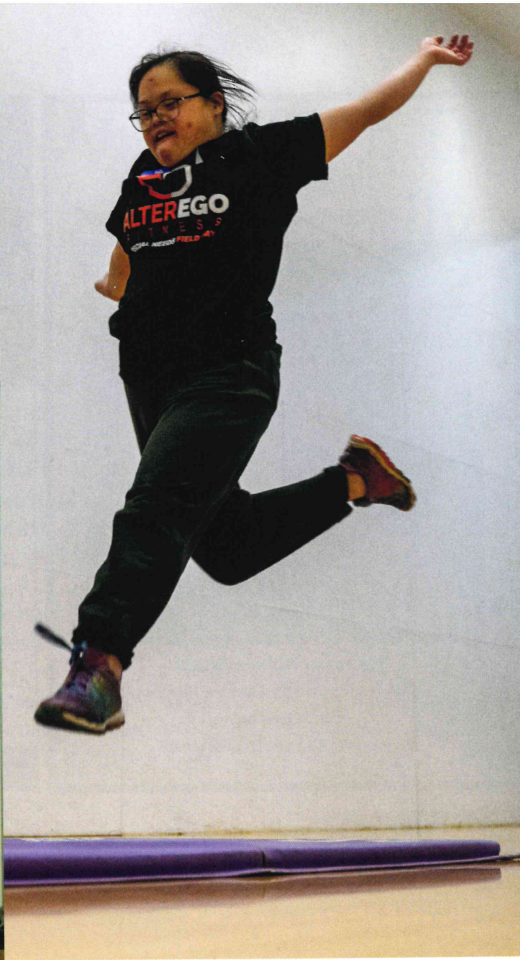


We Wear This Smile
Because Of You

Photos by Quinn Willoughby Photography



Best Version Media



WE WEAR THIS SMILE BECAUSE OF YOU

By Kaylin Winther

We have been so excited to be able to publish this February feature story. In January, Jeffrey Peka with AlterEgo Fitness with Aubry Knight, who runs the special needs program at the community center, came together and created the Special Needs Field Day for so many to enjoy at the Lapeer Recreation Center. The Special Needs Field Day is where the participants are timed doing different events such as long jump, obstacle courses, basketball, track, and shot put. Whether they were there to compete and show off skills, or watch someone they love compete, everyone there had so much fun, and the positive environment was unbelievable. These individuals have been practicing and putting in dedication to this event, and to see it come to life and have so many others join, it was truly amazing. Lauren Hancock, the publisher of Lapeer Living, and her daughter volunteered at this event and she says “when I volunteered for the Special Needs Field Day, I was hoping to be a blessing. What I didn’t count on, was I was the one who would be blessed. I was able to watch the growth, in not only ability, but socially as well. Weekly practices led up to the big day, and each athlete worked hard to get better! As my daughters and I walked into practice or the main event, we were greeted by smiles, shouts, hugs, and laughter. Who doesn’t need that?! Future plans are already being made for more events, and everyone is in! I recommend volunteering next time you can, because this was the most heart touching experience!” I also asked Jeffrey to talk a little about why he got into this event and his overall experience and this is what he had to say: “Aubry runs the special needs program at the community center and I kind of knew her just in passing as well as the people in her group. I always enjoyed the short amounts of time I would spend around them, so after Aubry came to me for personal training we kicked around the idea of putting on a special Olympics type of event with her group and hopefully others in the area. We

started really planning it and it eventually led to the great event on Saturday, January 15th. It truly exceeded all of my expectations and was so much more rewarding than I had anticipated. Watching the athletes have the time of their lives competing along with their parents' smiling faces made me so thankful that I had the chance to do this with Aubry. The athletes showed so much appreciation and enthusiasm throughout the whole process and I cannot wait until the next one. It meant the world to me to see the looks on those athletes' faces competing and receiving their medals at the end. It truly was a life changing experience and really opened my eyes to how giving people a chance to just belong to a team can make such a huge difference.

This was my first time being a part of the organizational process for an event like this so it definitely was a learning experience for me. I'm grateful I had Aubry with me, she put in so much work in making sure every little detail was perfect and without her it would not have been possible for this unforgettable experience to happen."

Our photographer, Quinn Willoughby also attended the event to capture the moments, but came out of it with much more than just photos. Quinn states "photographing the Special Needs Field Day has now surpassed most anything else I have done in my photography career; not because they are the greatest photographs I have created, but I had the opportunity to see all of these individuals triumph. We should practice to instill some of their determination to be the best we can in our own lives."

Now let's meet our athletes. There were 19 amazing individuals that competed in all of these events who gave it their all: Sara Saranchev (18) loves the show glee, Emily Spidle (18) won Lapeer homecoming queen this past year, David Stein (17) loves listening to music, Mariah Lovasz (24) loves to cook, Grant Johnston (17) loves swimming, Riley Luea (15) knows a song from every decade, Daniel Kraus (37) loves to go bowling, Jaclyn Kraus (35) is a social butterfly, Mackayla Hall (20) loves making new friends, Tiana Hall (16), David Drayer (26) enjoys working out, Isaiah Hall (17) loves singing karaoke, Jayne Bogert (23) loves beauty and the beast, Sammy Bogert (27) graduated school this past month, Agnes Bogert (18) enjoys choir, Jesse Kritzman (25) loves to laugh, Kyle Fick (26) enjoys watching football, Angeline Mileski (17) never stops laughing, and Caleb Mosher (22) who can run as fast as lightning. These individuals are so amazing in more ways than one. They worked so hard for this. They are so excited for this event to happen again. This was an experience like no other, if anyone has the chance to be a part of this, you will not regret it!

