

Neighbor Post

ECLC Gym Teacher Named 'Teacher of the Year' by Arc/Morris

Jan Arthur has a gift for coaching students with special needs to new heights, whether in gym class or on the school's sports teams.

By Amalia Duarte, Patch Poster | May 31, 2018 1:19 pm ET



As a physical education teacher and a coach, Jan Arthur helped transform Sammi Smith from a painfully shy teenager, who was reluctant to join any activities, into a three-sport varsity athlete at ECLC of New Jersey's school for students with special needs.

"The change in my daughter due to Mrs. Arthur's encouragement and her involvement in sports at ECLC was amazing," said her mother, Colleen. "Sammi came out of her shell. She learned confidence, sportsmanship and a love of basketball, soccer and softball from Mrs. Arthur. She is unbelievable. I really can't say enough about her."

For nearly three decades, Arthur has been encouraging and supporting students with special needs to master new skills and attain athletic goals in gym class and on competitive school teams. She created a sports program at ECLC and taught all students the importance of fitness, teamwork and sportsmanship.

On May 24, Arthur was named the Teacher of the Year by the Arc/Morris for "an exemplary career in serving students with special needs."

In recognizing Arthur, Board Member Wendy Abrahamson noted, "Cultivating relationships with other schools to create opportunities for her students to interact with their peers without disabilities is one of Ms. Arthur's major priorities. This has resulted in some outstanding outcomes, including an annual basketball game against the Chatham High football team!"

Nine individuals and organizations were recognized for outstanding service to people with special needs by the Arc/Morris, whose mission is the care, support and advancement of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

Smith nominated Arthur for the award because of her long lasting influence over Sammi and other students. She wrote, "Mrs. Arthur's philosophy and teaching methods include all students and athletes no matter what their ability level. She encourages all students to try a sport and applauds the positive for each student."

Arthur started teaching at ECLC in September 1991. Previously, she was a physical education teacher and coach at Madison Junior High School, Madison High School and Chatham High School. She remained as a field hockey assistant coach at Madison High School, winning five state championships, and was involved with the Chatham and Madison recreation programs for many years. When it came to her fulltime job, however, she turned down several opportunities to return to the public schools and chose to "stay with her heart" at ECLC.

"Sports is my 'thing.' I know I can teach anyone the basic skills of sports and improve their gross motor skills," said Arthur. "Physical education teachers never win awards like this, so I was shocked by the honor and quite surprised. It is great to feel appreciated by folks for what we try to do in the gym."

Many of Arthur's former students are still in touch and have returned for alumni basketball games or just to visit. "I want my students to have the same opportunities that my family and anyone else has as athletes. We try to keep it real and relevant for our students," said Arthur.

ECLC stands for "Education, Careers & Lifelong Community" and serves more than 800 children and adults from 11 counties who have special needs, including autism, Down syndrome and multiple disabilities. ECLC is an accredited, nonprofit with two private schools in Chatham and Ho-Ho-Kus, educating nearly 300 students, and offering adult programs and services.

At ECLC, all students graduate with a clear plan for their future. ECLC offers employment services through an affiliate, Community Personnel Services (CPS). Specialists from CPS help adults with disabilities find jobs in their communities and provide ongoing support and advocacy in the workplace. Graduates who are not ready for the workplace can enter the P.R.I.D.E. Adult Program, with centers in Florham Park and Paramus. More than 160 adults are enrolled in the P.R.I.D.E. Program, which is exclusively for ECLC's graduates. Adults in P.R.I.D.E. spend meaningful days continuing to learn and grow throughout adulthood. Learn more about ECLC.