



**NEWS**

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**Unity House IRA Resident Kelly Schwarting      Contact: Paul Marron 315-258-9531 X213  
Swims Her Way to Success**



Debbie (L) and Kelly Schwarting (R)

**AUBURN** – For Weedsport, NY native and Unity House consumer Kelly Schwarting, few sensations can compare to the comfort, feel, and sound of being in water.

“I don’t know what it is about the water, but I really love being in it, floating in it, and swimming in it,” smiled Schwarting, who currently resides at Unity House’s Prospect Pointe Options for People Through Services Individual Residential Alternative in Auburn, NY. “It’s been that way for as long as I can remember. I think the water and I were made for each other.”

Schwarting’s observation if any thing understates her affinity for the water and how its strong appeal has led her to achieve some remarkable goals, not the least of which were her accomplishments competing in - and winning and placing at - the 2007 Special Olympics World Games in Shanghai, China this past October. For this likeable young woman, who had a perfect attendance record in high school, living with a disability is but a bump in the road to growth and independence.

Certainly, her experience learning to swim and swimming competitively bear that out.

Schwarting's mother, Deb Schwarting, says her daughter and sons all grew up liking water and started swimming at an early age. For Kelly, however, that age probably was earlier than most.

"Our family was vacationing in Virginia at a large public park that had a large public pool," she said. "My husband and I all of a sudden heard this big splash and we looked and saw Kelly just jump right in the pool. She's was attracted to it from the get go. It's as if it was her first love that has remained a first love."

From that age and telling event, Schwarting has been in water as much as she's been out of it. In her elementary school years she was taking lessons and swimming regularly at the Weedsport high school pool. By the time she reached the middle school level, she excelled enough at certain strokes, especially the freestyle, to make the combined boys and girls swim team. She had every intention of swimming competitively in high school but, because Weedsport only fielded a boy's team, she participated in field hockey and track and kept swimming on the side, mostly at the Auburn YMCA. After graduating and enrolling in a BOCES program, Kelly learned of a special olympics team that practiced at her high school alma mater pool, and shortly thereafter joined it.

"I've been on the team for about four years now," she pointed out. "When I started, the coaches try and figure out your level and what stroke you're good at and what one you need work on. I was good at and liked freestyle, mostly because it's not as tough as the others and you can get in more of a smooth motion with it. I had the best times in it, too. I also got to like the breast stroke."

That team and coaches honed Schwarting's skills during weekly practices, which were her springboard to statewide competition this past summer, at the NY State Special Olympic games

in Albany. There, Schwarting won first place in her freestyle event, which qualified her for a spot on the U.S. Special Olympics team. It was then that the exceptional work began, preparing her for international competition.

“She went from once-a-week workouts at Weedsport to three times a week and also put in extra time at the Aubrun Y pool,” said Schwarting’s mother, who sits on the Cayuga County Community Services Board and who also has chaired the Board’s MRDD subcommittee for the past year and a half. “She and her coaches worked hard to get her in shape mentally and physically. They did a great job helping Kelly transition from her NY State experience to her national and international experiences.”

In July of this year, Kelly traveled as a U.S. team member to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee for that team’s training camp, in preparation for the international competition in China. While there, she stayed with other team members in a dormitory and enjoyed the company of other swimmers with disabilities, including a deaf roommate.

“I really liked her, and even got to learn some sign language from her,” grinned Schwarting. “I sort of had to, to be able to understand her and have her understand me, so that was a good experience just because of that alone.”

At the end of September of this year, Schwarting embarked upon what has been to date the longest journey of her life, to the international games in Shanghai. Her flight to that city originated in Albany and included stops in Los Angeles, Alaska, and Japan, she said Her mother and father, whose sons’ swimming competitions have taken them out of state but never out of country, joined Kelly and her teammates for the start of the international competition on October 2, 2007, following their 14-hour nonstop flight to Shanghai from Chicago.

“We stayed in a hotel the whole time in Shanghai and I had several roommates there, it was kind of a suite where we all shared common things,” Schwarting said. “My closest roommate was from Virginia, we became pretty good friends.

“We first got there a couple of days before the games began, and our whole team was split into parts and we visited these kind of host neighborhoods where we had welcome events and also visited host families in two or three teammate groups,” she recalled, in describing some of the social highlights of her two and one-half week stay. “We tried lots of real Chinese food, which I didn’t like all that much. I think chicken and fish are their favorite foods. I learned to use chop sticks a lot, though. The host family volunteers also took us on a bus tour to a mall that was interesting.”

Schwarting’s hard work and diligence truly paid off at the international games where, she said, she’d never seen a swimming pool complex as large as the one she swam in, in Shanghai. Sticking to her coaches’ advice to not worry about how big the pool was or even winning but to concentrate instead on lowering her best times, Schwarting won silver medals in the 200 medley relay and 400 freestyle, and finished third in the 100 breaststroke and fourth in the 200 freestyle, earning a total of four medals and one ribbon.

“I was happy with my swimming,” she smiled. “You don’t know what to expect so you just stick with your plan to try and lower your times. The pool was bigger than I thought and the starting blocks were different, but the rules for us are the same as for competitor swimmers without disabilities, so you just swim your best and remember about lowering your times.”

Schwarting said she thought the fastest swimmers were members of the Australian and Chinese teams.

“They were incredible!” she exclaimed. “They seemed the fastest and best. I think they might practice even more than us.”

Schwarting added that on the last day of the competition she didn’t compete, which allowed her and her parents to also take in a tour of a Chinese silk factory and learn how that luxury fabric is produced. She has several pictures of the process in a photo album she organized after returning to Auburn.

The next special olympics world games are scheduled to be held in Athens, Greece in 2011. Schwarting said she would love to go to that competition’s swimming events, too, but must first get confirmation that she can swim in more than one special olympics world competition. If she cannot swim in more than one, she said she would consider switching to another sport at which she could compete and qualify locally, statewide, and nationally, to get to the Athens world games.

Between now and then, guess where Schwarting will be spending lots of time?

“Back on my special olympics team right here in Weedsport, and at the Auburn Y pool, too,” she grinned. “Swimming and competing again.”