

2010 Community Awards

Jason Furlong of Parkland *"Tennis Is My Life"*

Living as a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, Jason Furlong faced a litany of internal and external obstacles. For example, when he first grasped a pencil in elementary school, the prognosis he was given by the Florida public school system was that he would never write.

Similarly, when he first held a tennis racquet, it seemed the art of hitting a tennis ball would be well beyond his grasp. However, instead of taking the easy way out and running from his challenges, Jason embraced them.

Fighting his entire life to be like everyone else, he would often ask, "Why am I different?" Fortunately, those questions abated significantly once Jason discovered tennis in middle school and developed a true passion for it.

Through the art of tennis and his training sessions at the Synergy Tennis Academy in Tamarac, Jason has been able to gain access to a world he never thought he would fit into -- and become complete. Because his hard work has led to him amassing a large collection of tournament trophies and awards, Jason continues to work toward his life's goal of playing professional tennis -- and emulating the accomplishments of his favorite player -- world No. 1 Rafael Nadal.



COMMUNITY TENNIS ASSOCIATION (CTA) VOLUNTEER(S) OF THE YEAR

Susie DeMille and Liz C. Kawecky of Amelia Island *"We Are Family"*

In the summer of 2010, Susie DeMille, who serves as the Kraft Tennis Partners 10-and-under QuickStart Tennis director, and her sister, Liz Kawecky, were awarded the largest grant in the state of Florida by the USTA for their "Share the Love" Campaign, which introduces children from the ages of 5 to 10 to the "FUN"-damentals of tennis. Because they possess such a passion for junior tennis, Susie and Liz have shared their experience, knowledge, and love of the game with youngsters who may have never had the opportunity to play tennis.

Their crowning achievement was the establishment of a nine-week QuickStart Kids Tennis Camp that is hosted and supported by members of Kraft Tennis Partners, who volunteered their time and assistance to make the program a success. Over 95 children, including 10 who received scholarships from the Boys & Girls Club at the Kraft Athletic Club, participated in the program.

In an attempt to keep the participants involved following the program's conclusion, the duo also established a QuickStart Jr. Team Tennis League in Amelia Island in the fall of 2010. Thanks to these laudable accomplishments, this spectacular "sister act" is a worthy recipient of the CTA Volunteer of the Year Award.



Sisters Liz Kawecky and Susie DeMille

OUTSTANDING DIVERSITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Hebni Nutrition Consultants, Inc., of Orlando

(Accepting the award, Fabriola Gaines)

"Keep Your Diet Straight"

Childhood obesity has become a pervasive problem in the United States, which is why the efforts of Hebni Nutrition Consultants, Inc. are so commendable. The company, which is a community-based, not-for-profit agency, was formed in 1995 to educate high-risk, culturally diverse populations about nutrition strategies to prevent diet-related diseases.

In response to the alarming increase in childhood obesity across the nation, Hebni developed the K.Y.D.S. Take Charge (Keeping Your Diet Straight) Program in 2006 to bring nutrition education and tennis instruction to low-income minority youth in an effort to prevent/reduce childhood obesity, which is on the rise in Orange County. In 2010 they received a USTA Florida "Share the Love" grant to increase the reach of the program in Orlando.

K.Y.D.S. is an after-school and summer program that is offered free of charge and includes cooking demonstrations, weekly tennis lessons and exercise classes, pedometer tracking, food diaries, and regular body-mass-index readings to monitor the children's progress. During the 2009 calendar year, 241 youths participated in the K.Y.D.S. Program, with 82 of them showing increased knowledge and improved behavior toward eating healthier, while 94 percent of participants showed improved tennis skills as tracked by their USTA-certified tennis instructors.



USTA SCHOOL TENNIS VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Jane T. Fountain of Deland

"Tennis, Everyone!"

Before Jane Fountain took over her local USTA Florida schools league, the tennis season lasted a scant eight weeks. Today, thanks to Jane's perseverance and ingenuity, the team is in action approximately 28 weeks each school year.

The team currently participates in three USTA leagues (fall, spring, and the new Volusia County Middle School league). Out of 130 middle school students, at least 25 join tennis each year and dedicate themselves to practicing and playing three days a week. Just how committed is Jane to her cause? Because many parents work, she goes above and beyond the call of duty by personally transporting players to and from matches and/or practices. During the spring season, she oversees four teams with four different match times.

Frequently, Jane arrives for matches around 4:30 p.m. and doesn't get home until after 9:00 in the evening by the time she drives some of the players home. Her efforts have paid huge dividends, resulting in the St. Barnabas Episcopal School earning titles at the 2010 Spring Jr. Team Tennis 14-and-under Intermediate League Championships, the 2009 Fall Jr. Team Tennis 12-and-under Novice League Championships, and the 2008 Spring Jr. Team Tennis 14-and-under Novice League Championships.



NATIONAL JUNIOR TENNIS LEAGUE (NJTL) CHAPTER LEADER OF THE YEAR

Katie Kreichelt of Jacksonville

"Hakuna Matata...No Worries"

Katie Kreichelt, who serves as director of program services for the MaliVai Washington Kids Foundation (MWKF), has been involved with the organization in a leadership capacity for more than four years. During that time, Katie has managed all programs for MWKF's after-school and summer camp programs, and served as life skills coordinator.

During her tenure, she played a role in opening the MaliVai Washington Youth Center, which includes eight full courts (six with 60-foot 10-and-under QuickStart play format tennis lines) and three with 36-foot QuickStart tennis courts. Katie has expanded the NJTL program to include a daily after-school and summer camp program and added a home-school program, high school clinics, community clinics for children, and additional outreach programs.

She also is fully responsible for the off-court academic and life-skill programs that MWKF offers. Prior to working for the MaliVai Washington Kids Foundation, Katie was a Peace Corps volunteer in Costa Rica, where she taught English, art, and music classes to local children, ran girls' empowerment classes, and organized annual field days for the village.

With all the accomplishments she has achieved on behalf of children worldwide, it's clear that Katie Kreichelt is a worthy recipient of any award that comes her way.



TENNIS ON CAMPUS COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR

Tim Gaccione of Naples

"The Secret to Getting Cooperation Is to Think About Other People's Goals"

In his role as president of the Florida Gulf Coast University Club (FGCU) Tennis Team, Tim Gaccione has helped lead the organization to greater levels of accomplishment each year. Since its establishment in 2007, the club has grown from a very small entity with players who were just looking for a friendly hit every once in awhile into an extremely accomplished club that competes on a national level.

Priding itself on a competitive spirit based on the tenets of sportsmanship and team unity, the club holds a season kickoff event every September that features free food, drinks, prizes, games, and music, with this year's tournament attracting about 100 participants.

In 2009, the club played a full schedule in the Florida 'Tennis on Campus' series for the first time, qualifying to compete in the national championships. The club also co-hosted the Battle of the Southeastern Regional Championships and will be hosting its very own tournament in early 2011. Based on the aforementioned achievements, it's easy to discern why Tim Gaccione is this year's Tennis on Campus Coordinator of the Year.



USTA JR. TEAM TENNIS LOCAL LEAGUE COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR

Linda Green of Gainesville

"High Hopes"

According to those who know Linda Green, who serves as area league coordinator of the Gainesville USTA Jr. Team Tennis League, she has done an outstanding job of growing the program thanks to her singular dedication, heart, endurance, skills, and diplomacy. In addition to caring about each child, she works closely with the parents and coaches to ensure that each team has an enjoyably competitive experience at the local level.

Since taking over the league in the summer of 2006, which was on a hiatus for several years, she has increased participation figures each year. In the fall of 2009, there were 175 players comprising 21 teams; in the spring of 2010, that number swelled to 230 players comprising 24 teams. Additionally, teams from the Gainesville league have attended numerous sectional tournaments over the past several years and experienced great success.

As if her volunteer agenda wasn't busy enough, Linda also serves as president of the Gainesville Area Community Tennis Association, which provided funding for a pilot program introducing the 10-and-under QuickStart play format at three local elementary schools during the fall of 2009. Evidence of the program's success was evidenced earlier this summer when two QuickStart teams formed. Regardless of the situation, Linda Green maintains decorum and a level-headedness that ensures a solid solution to each crisis, resulting in a boost for junior tennis in Gainesville and the 2010 USTA Jr. Team Tennis Local League Coordinator of the Year award.

