

# Aquatics healer gets career honors



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## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Ann Wieser, a Greensboro resident since 1975, was recently honored with the 2010 John K. Williams International Adapted Aquatics Award by the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

This award honors those who have provided dedicated services to and advanced the field of adapted aquatics, swimming for persons with disabilities.

Wieser's education, experience and dedication has equipped her to help many children and adults with special needs and disabling conditions.

From 2003 to 2008, she was assigned to the Gateway Education Center to work in the water and in the gym with children with disabilities.

As an itinerant adapted physical educator, she travels to 10 different schools each week to work with students with disabilities. Sigmund Williams' mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis eight years ago. He is grateful that Wieser worked with his mother in the pool at the Bryan Family YMCA.

"Ann Wieser has been a valuable asset to our family and my mom's overall goal of continued mobility," Williams said. "We have found that water therapy has been one of the most beneficial therapies for her."

Williams said stretches and exercises that his mom can't do on land are easier in the water. "The water removes a lot of the muscle tensions experienced on land."

Williams said many insurance companies will not pay for water therapy, which isn't considered essential for rehabilitation.

Wieser has worked with all age groups. Her youngest client is 4 and her oldest is 83.

As a private contractor with the Bryan YMCA, Wieser works individually with most of her clients who come weekly for 30-minute sessions.

"I begin working with clients as a massage therapist because I am not a medical practitioner,"

Wieser said. "I have clients, not patients." (She received her doctorate in education in 1995 from UNCG.)

Wieser has many success stories, such as working with a 6-month-old child who had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy. His mother had been told that he would never be able to develop head control. In four months, he was holding his head up on his own.

Another case involved a 50-year-old woman who had arthritis and had been bedridden for more than a year. After seven months of working in the water, she went on a cruise and bragged about walking all over the ship.

A child with severe attention deficit disorder had an enormous fear of the water, but after therapy with Wiener, was able to develop the ability to maintain focus for longer periods in the water and classroom.

Wieser tells of a man who had no movement in his left arm because of a stroke and had been told that he would never regain use of his arm. After working in the water, he has begun to move and use his arm.

Wiener believes that the water is a miraculous environment, because it helps a person who has limited movement on land to improve. The sensory stimulation of water is relaxing, calming and decreases pain. The resistance of the water also builds strength and provides support for balance and walking.

Wieser's love for water began when she was 5 when her family moved from the mountains to Virginia Beach, Va. She was mesmerized by the ocean's vastness and the unending ebb and flow of waves. The ocean became her playmate, and she taught herself to swim at age 7.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANN WIESER

Ann Wieser receives the 2010 John K. Williams International Adapted Aquatics Award.

By her sophomore year at Westhampton College of the University of Richmond, Wieser knew that she wanted to work in aquatics in community programs or at a college or university. At that time, she had no idea how to develop a career path as an aquatics trainer.

By 1980, Wieser got a job in High Point as an aquatics director and took her first adapted aquatics course with the Red Cross.

She developed and implemented an adapted aquatics program for the YWCA with the cooperation of the High Point school system and High Point Parks and Recreation Special Olympics.

In 1988 Wieser was hired at UNCG as a coordinator of aquatic instruction. While at UNCG, she planned and scheduled the aquatic curriculum and activity classes and taught adapted aquatic classes.

By 1991, Wieser had implemented and supervised a Red Cross grant program at UNCG to coordinate with the Greensboro Parks and Recreation Department for a lifeguard-training program for at-risk students in the commu-

nity.

She also developed undergraduate degree programs in aquatic instruction and management and in aquatics for therapy and rehabilitation in 1998. This was one of the first university undergraduate aquatic therapy professional preparation programs in the United States.

"I love teaching and watching students enjoy being in the water," Wieser said. "I enjoy sharing in their success as students work to extend their aquatic skills."

...Working in the water, I am a teacher, facilitator, listener and learner. I am aware of how a person with a disability is interacting with the water, and I develop activities that extend what the person can do to what the person wants to do."

To suggest a person or organization that is "Making a Difference" or has in the past in Guilford County, contact Peggy Longmire at [plongmire@trud.rtr.com](mailto:plongmire@trud.rtr.com) or 288-9040.

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