

YMCA youth soccer coach retiring

The magic words, "You are a winner," were first heard by John Crane of Greensboro when he was a kid playing soccer for the first time at the Brandywine YMCA in Wilmington, Del.

His YMCA camp director pointed out that everyone at the camp was a winner and having fun was the most important thing they were to do in playing soccer.

As a coach, Crane has tried to pass along those same messages to his own soccer players.

After 25 seasons of coaching youth soccer at the Guilford College YMCA and, most recently, at the Spears Family YMCA, Crane is retiring from coaching to be more available to his two children, 10-year-old Nick and 6-year-old Madison, students at Sternberger Elementary. Their mother died in recent years.

"John's voice carried through the air," Jeff Renz said of Crane as he coached his teams. Renz said Crane would call out, "You're a winner," after a child would fail to block a shot. If the child's head went down in disappointment, Crane would run to him or her, get down on one knee, look the child in the eye and say, "You are a winner — all of you guys are winners."

As a Nestle professional in sales, covering North Carolina, South Carolina and the eastern half of Tennessee, Crane's job requires him to be on the road a great deal. As the sole parent of his children, he also has home and parenting responsibilities. Yet, he always made sure he was at soccer practices and games.

"He really sacrificed to be there regularly as a coach," Renz said.

This past soccer season marked Crane's 25th working with 5- to 6-year-old kids in the Greensboro YMCA program. He said he feels honored and blessed to have worked with great parents and the YMCA staff.

Crane joked about remembering the parents by their children's names, such as "Kirsten's dad" or "Eric's mom."

At the beginning of each season, Crane told his soccer parents the two most important things to him as a coach are: each child realizes and understands that he or she is a winner; and when children step on the field, the most important thing they need to do is to have fun.

Life and soccer are competitive rough, especially as children



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grow older.

From the first practice, Crane told his players that whenever they hear or see the word "winner," they are to think of themselves.

With a twinkle in his eye, Crane said he is one of the highest paid coaches in the state. He regularly reminded his players that they can score for having fun, for meeting new friends and even passing the ball.

"I firmly believe that if one player walks off the field thinking he or she is a loser, then we all share in the blame," Crane said.

Crane enjoys keeping up with his former players. Sometimes Crane will hear "Coach, I'm a winner," ring out from across the parking lot at the Friendly Center.

Over the years, Crane has seen players who excelled in soccer go on to play other sports.

One of his former players, Chris Jasperse, will attend Marshall University and play football this fall. Crane plans to make the trip to see his former player, who is now 6-foot 5 inches tall and close to 300 pounds.

"It seems like just last Saturday that he was only 6 years old running down the field with a huge smile on his face," Crane

said.

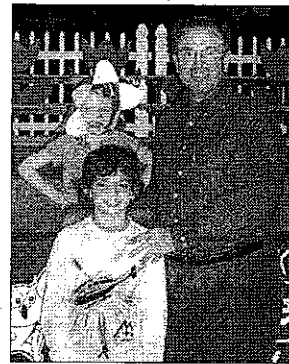
Crane credits his father, Talbot Crane, a World War II veteran, for being a good role model to him and his sisters, Cinda, Nancy and Jane.

"I once played on a little league team that did not win a game all season," Crane recalled. "He supported me and the team like it was the World Series."

"He taught me to enjoy the wins, but to be respectful of the opposing teams. In defeat, he taught me to always acknowledge the winner and to learn from my mistakes."

Being the sole parent of two small children and traveling for a living has presented challenges and opportunities to Crane. He is appreciative of the children's local grandparents, Sharon and Dan Phillips, who have been instrumental in his life and also to their grandfather, Jet Jackson, another valuable person in the lives of his children.

Crane also has received valuable support from friends, his church family and Sternberger



COURTESY OF JOHN CRANE

John Crane of Greensboro is retiring after 25 seasons of coaching youth soccer. He is shown with his two children, Madison and Nick.

Elementary staff and teachers.

"Coach Crane has been a great friend and outstanding role model for youth in the YMCA's sport programs," said Pete Baker, associate executive direc-

tor of Spears Family YMCA. "He is always eager to help everyone and shows his excitement towards helping others. From our days at the Guilford College YMCA and at the Spears YMCA, coach Crane has been there with our soccer program. I wish him the best."

Crane's plans for the future include staying involved with the sports and activities that his children choose to play.

"Maybe years from now a YMCA soccer coach will talk about old coach Crane and the impact he had on their lives," Crane said.

"To have the opportunity to make a positive impression and to build or reinforce self-esteem in a young player, that's what makes it all meaningful and worthwhile."

To suggest a person or organization that is "Making a Difference" or has in the past in Guilford County, contact Peggy Longmire at 288-9040 or rlongmire@triad.rr.com

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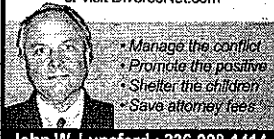


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