

TRIBUTE

Eunice Kennedy Shriver 'changed the world, one child at a time'

Special to the Standard

With great sadness, the Catholic Coalition for Special Education mourns the passing of Eunice Kennedy Shriver. Mrs. Shriver devoted her life to helping the world understand and appreciate that all God's children can live and thrive in our families, our communities and our schools. As early as 1968, Mrs. Shriver, initiated what soon became a worldwide organization, the Special Olympics, an organization dedicated to showcasing not only the athletic abilities of young people with

developmental disabilities, but their determination, their drive, their humanity. Now, Special Olympics is the largest sports organization worldwide for children and adults who have developmental disabilities.

Mrs. Shriver, who would jump into a pool to help a child learn to swim or work side-by-side on a soccer field with children in the Special Olympics, changed the world — one child at a time. She changed expectations. Watching children and young adults engage in athletic activities at the Special Olympics made us

Eunice Shriver's support shaped outreach at Kennedy Institute

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Eunice Kennedy Shriver found inspiration for her life's work as a volunteer physical education teacher at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Institute in Washington. Founded in 1959, the Kennedy Institute is an organization of the Archdiocese of Washington that provides education, career development, family support and other services for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

Mrs. Shriver became one of the first physical education teachers at Kennedy Institute in 1965 because of her strong belief that physical education would help children with disabilities grow psychologically, emotionally and mentally. She understood that children with disabilities had the same desire to compete and participate as other children. During her two years as a teacher, she saw her students reach their full potential and soon after founded the internationally-acclaimed Special Olympics. Twenty students from Kennedy Institute participated in that first Olympics in 1968, collecting nine gold, five silver and three bronze medals.

For many years after, Mrs. Shriver opened her home in Timberlawn to children at Kennedy School as a summer camp.

The Kennedy Institute was founded through a \$500,000 gift from the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation along with \$500,000 provided by the Archdiocese of Washington under the leadership of then-Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur operated the school, serving children who ranged in age from five to 18-years-old.

On Oct. 1, Kennedy Institute will celebrate 50 years of service. More than 500 children and adults in the metropolitan area benefit annually from its programs.

"Few people have lived their lives with the tireless energy that Eunice Shriver did in her lifelong dedication to individuals with developmental disabilities," said Ed Orzechowski, president and CEO of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, which has run the Kennedy Institute since 2004.

"The Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Institute's ability to serve and work with those individuals, and their families, is largely due to Mrs. Shriver's very public compassion and advocacy on behalf of a group who had never before had a voice — or such a dedicated champion. Catholic Charities' prayers and sympathies are with her family as well as the massive extended family whose lives were improved by this incredible woman's life."



CNS PHOTO/ADAM HUNGER, REUTERS

Pallbearers Anthony Kennedy Shriver, Patrick Schwarzenegger, Maria Kennedy Shriver, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tim Shriver Jr., Mark Kennedy Shriver and Tim Kennedy Shriver carry the casket of Eunice Kennedy Shriver in a procession for her funeral Mass at St. Francis Xavier Church in Hyannis, Mass., Aug. 14. Eunice Shriver, who founded the Special Olympics and was a member of one of the most prominent American Catholic political families of the 20th century, died Aug. 11 at age 88 at a hospital on Cape Cod.

all see what she inherently knew, that all children are special, that all children can look to the stars to make their own dreams come true, that all children deserve respect, love and guidance.

Mrs. Shriver and her dream-come-true, the Special Olympics, helped inspire the creation of the Catholic Coalition for Special Education in Washington. In 2007, CCSE was most honored to welcome Mrs. Shriver to its Spring Benefit where her son, Timothy P. Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics, served as honorary chair of the event. "The hidden secret," explained Timothy Shriver about his work and that of his mother, "is that people with disabilities present enormous learning opportunities to those who do not have disabilities about the value of courage, determination and openness that comes with the simple gifts of love, tolerance and acceptance." It is this message that CCSE hopes to convey through its "Share the Word" campaign, and through its effort to help Catholic schools include

students with developmental disabilities in their education programs.

For all the honors and awards Mrs. Shriver has received throughout her life, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, her greatest legacy remains the Special Olympics, which emerged in her own backyard. As she told the

Washington Post. "I think that really the only way you change people's attitudes or behavior is to work with them. Not write papers or serve on committees. . . It's quite simple, actually."

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