

Magazine: Coach is one of most caring

By JOEY LEWANDOWSKI
EDITORIAL INTERN

MOUNTAINSIDE — In her 12th year as head coach of Children's Lightning Wheels, Trisha Yurochko was named one of 10 finalists — of more than 1,500 nominees — in USA WEEKEND Magazine's 17th Most Caring Coach contest.

"I was flabbergasted, overwhelmed, greatly honored," Yurochko said. "They caught me speechless. That's not usually my thing. I usually always have something to say, but I was totally caught off-guard."

Children's Lightning Wheels, a sports program for people with disabilities sponsored by Children's Specialized Hospital, has roughly 27 athletes between ages 9 and 21.

Yurochko, who has been the team's head coach since 1997, has remained involved with sports because of what she says it provides: responsibility, team-building, camaraderie, pride from wearing a uniform. But what keeps her coming back are the relationships she builds with the children.

"I love the kids. I love seeing them achieve and doing things they never thought they were able to do. I love watching their faces," she said. "They've taught me a lot over the years — they've probably taught me more than I've taught them. I just enjoy watching them succeed, watching them build confidence and carrying that confidence on as they get older and become successful adults."

Eileen Whalen, whose son Matthew Fertig has played for Yurochko for about six years, nominated Yurochko after seeing the contest advertised in the paper and thinking it was a great way to honor her.

"The amount of time that she puts into working with these children, it's like a part-time job," Whalen said. "People volunteer and do their part, but she just goes so over and above, and the benefit to our children is just tremendous."

"She's a part of their life, not just their coach in the sport," she added. "She just gives and gives and gives. I thank God for her because it's been a wonderful, wonderful thing for my son."

Currently, Yurochko and the Lightning Wheels are gearing up for the national competition, which takes place in St. Louis in July. Athletes qualify for the event in regional meets if they meet the qualifying standard.

