

Columnist to be honored with Lifetime Achievement Award for disabled athletics

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By Amy Allen, Journal Register News Service

Jerry Wolffe, 63, of Macomb Township is being presented with the Rick Knas Lifetime Achievement Award by the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame on Oct. 22.

Wolffe, the "Voices of Disability" columnist for The Oakland Press in Pontiac, will receive the award at a banquet at the Royal Park Hotel in Rochester for his athletic achievements and educating the public about people with disabilities.

While attending Wayne State University, Wolffe competed in wheelchair games with the WSU Roadrunners.

By using adaptive equipment, Wolffe said he has done waterskiing, snow skiing, bowling, table tennis and ice hockey.

Wolffe won the silver and gold medals in table tennis, claiming second place in the national finals in New York City, just missing out on going to the 1968 Paralympics.

He won the Michigan title several times in the late 1960s.

"You can do whatever your mind tells you to," said Wolffe, echoing the teaching of his late father, Vincent, and 94-year-old mother, Carol.

The Miracle League of Michigan in Southfield, created with the help of Wolffe's "Voices of Disability" columns, supports that motto by offering children with physical or mental disabilities an accessible baseball field and giving them the opportunity to play in an organized league.

"Once they (the children) cross that line, they are just kids playing baseball," Wolffe said.

Wolffe tries to educate the public on the triumphs and struggles of people with disabilities as his column, started in 1999, demonstrates. The column has won about 20 journalism awards from The Associated Press, Michigan Press Association and Society of Professional Journalists.

As an Americans with Disabilities Act implementer, Wolffe inspects buildings, ensuring they comply with the ADA Architectural Guidelines and are accessible.

He also speaks in many venues in the hopes that stereotypes regarding the 60 million people with disabilities are eliminated and attitudes about the disabled improve during his lifetime.

Of the awards he has achieved, including two each from the EEOC and Department of Justice for his ADA work, the Unsung Hero Award from the Disability Network of Oakland/Macomb, the Jim Neubacher Award from the Community Mental Health Authority and the Dove Award from the ARC of Oakland County, he is most proud of the Rick Knas Lifetime Achievement award.

Wolffe, a veteran journalist of 41 years who has worked at The Associated Press in Detroit, Chicago and Lansing, United Press International for 23 years and The Oakland Press since 1993, will be the 11th person to win the Rick Knas award given annually from among nominees from throughout the nation.

