

Remembrance of James Michael Gleason

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Special Olympics



It is difficult to put into words the significance and impact of a person, especially one as remarkable as James Michael Gleason. Jim was a colleague, a friend, and a team member of Special Olympics FUNfitness and of all Special Olympics Healthy Athletes.

Jim dedicated his entire professional life to improve the care and the understanding of people with intellectual disabilities (ID). His work at the Shriver Center not only extended what we know about the abilities and fitness of those with ID, but he taught many others to understand and appreciate the abilities of this population. In every encounter with a person with ID, his caring and his respect for their abilities and personal qualities was ever apparent. He was patient, kind and gently with everyone he engaged, and they loved him in return. His work with Ironstone Farm, using horses in a working farm environment to improve the abilities, strength, hope and courage of those with disabilities, stands as another testament to his love and concern for those with disability.

Jim was a very intelligent man who added so significantly to our FUNfitness program and to Healthy Athletes in general. His ability to listen, research, learn, and understand was only matched by his tremendous ability to engage others in his concerns. He had a wonderful way of explaining the essence of an issue, engaging others in discussion, and coming to a successful confluence of opinion and plan. His quiet manner in these encounters was always effective in creating a positive team environment. He was an understated leader and thinker but also a collaborator and team player.

Jim was a great contributor to FUNfitness. As the Coordinator of Education and Research, he shepherded our efforts to create quality teaching materials and experiences. He understood the student, and was invaluable in his work to simplify but clarify our educational materials. But he also understood the abilities of our athletes, and was able to guide us to design materials that would be accessible to them as well.

Jim was one of the strongest research voices within Special Olympics Healthy Athletes. As a researcher himself, he understood the importance of consent, identify protection, quality and integrity of data. He was invaluable in helping to establish our data forms and data analysis systems. He guided us through the development of research questions, and developed relationships with universities and student researchers to assist us and to teach them. It was always a bilateral learning experience with Jim, and he has a tremendous ability to communicate ideas and concepts to his students.

Jim was a gentle soul, who traveled widely and loved and respected other cultures and ideas. He was always ready to experience and learn other ways with an open and interested mind. His love, of course, was everything Irish. He visited Ireland many times, loved his Irish beer and Irish song. He was a talented singer and musician who enjoyed playing with several Irish groups, having as much fun as the audience.



He worked hard, but could play hard as well. He had a wonderful ability to kick back and enjoy the company of those around him. He added a zest and peacefulness to every engagement.

Jim loved and valued his family and friends. His wife Debbie and daughter Anne punctuated his conversation when he was away, and he always looked forward to them joining him on his SOI trips.

But most of all, Jim was a friend. I looked forward to talking and working with him in person or on the phone. He was always pleasant, balanced, and helpful in every situation. I miss his sage wisdom on so many topics.

Jim - a gentle, kind, loving soul. You are and will continue to be missed! You left many impressions on FUNfitness that will serve as your legacy of commitment.