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Getting people 'back to health'

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Dianna Carda has won a variety of swimming medals by competing through the Dwarf Athletic Association of America.

Dianna Carda calls her life a progression. Each step along the way has led to something better.

She grew up in Elkhorn, the third oldest child of 12. Her parents and siblings made no concessions to Dianna's dwarfism. She was just one of the kids and did everything her brothers and sisters did.

The entire family — others are of average height — is an athletic bunch. That athleticism led to her interest in physical education, which she taught for several years, and her passion for wellness — for herself and for others.

Carda surely faced physical and mental challenges in her 50-plus years. There were cruelties, intentional or unintentional, stares and hurtful words. But she doesn't dwell on any of that.

She says she has been extremely lucky in almost every way; people and organizations have always been there for her. Now she is trying to give back.

"I'm using my teaching skills to help people get back to health," she said.

That's her business; she's a wellness consultant. "Without health, you have nothing," she said.

As a little person, she faces the same problems average-height people do, but there also are physical conditions that make staying fit and healthy more difficult. Carda says little people are prone to weight gain and joint problems. Some suffer heart problems or breathing disorders.

Carda's mission is to help all people — little people and average-size people — reach their optimum degrees of wellness, no matter their conditions or limitations.

She tours the world giving wellness talks and seminars. She talks to groups and schools on subjects such as diversity, physical fitness or her life as a little person.

Carda also serves as an ambassador for dwarfism. She says she's comfortable in her body.

She attended her first Little People of America conference in 2000. That led her to found the Nebraska and western Iowa chapter of LPA. She is president of the group now.

It's another way she tries to help others. Carda said she helps provide support and information in three areas: social, medical and

educational. Families or individuals affected by dwarfism are always welcome to contact her through the chapter.

“I’m here to serve the community, whatever the area,” she said.

At the LPA conference, she also learned about the Dwarf Athletic Association competitions. In 2001, she set the world record in her age group in the butterfly.

It was a thrilling experience, she said. She had always competed against average-size swimmers and was used to coming in last. Once in the pool beside her dwarf peers, she excelled.

“It totally amazed me,” she said. “I’d always wondered what it would be like to swim against someone my own size.”

World records in the backstroke and freestyle have followed.

Now she has set her sights on the Para Olympic Trials, and will be swimming longer distances and swimming against competitors much younger than herself. So when she travels to Ireland for the World Dwarf Games next week, she will face stiff competition.

No matter. The records are nice, Carda said, but it’s the competition and the friends she has made around the world that count.

She’s not all work and competition. She owns two paso fino horses, Chelsea and Mateo, and loves to ride. She also likes to read and eat chocolates.

Eat chocolates?

“Only healthy chocolate,” she said with a grin.

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