

Mitzvot from the heart: Mark Rodgers


Story

Comments

Share  Print  Font Size:  

Posted: Wednesday, September 28, 2011 10:45 am |

Updated: 10:50 am, Wed Sep 28, 2011.

 0 comments

Mark Rodgers

Central Reform Congregation

Mark ran into his old swim teacher, Sarah Marx, at services one Shabbat morning. Marx, of Super Swimmers Academy, remembered what a great kid Mark was and asked him to be her assistant in a special needs class. Mark loves to swim and thought, "That sounds like fun, why not?" and gave it a try.

It was a very rewarding experience for Mark, son of Janet and Lee Rodgers of Clayton. He worked one-on-one with several autistic children this past spring at Rainbow Village. Each student had different skills and

Mark Rodgers

needs, yet Mark was able to help each one.

"Mark's ability to connect with my students with special needs was remarkable," said Marx. "Quite a few of these students were non-verbal. He seemed to have a natural ability to connect with children and to teach. He genuinely seemed to enjoy working with the kids. He always showed enthusiasm. He not only carried out my instructions, but he was able to initiate what he thought appropriate; he was usually right on! Because of Mark's ability to take initiative and to work independently, I asked him to help me to teach swimming this summer at a camp for kids with special needs," she continued.

On a typical day, Marx would tell Mark what she wanted the kids to do, put their face in the water or lie on their back, and Mark would do the skill right in front of them and keep urging the student until they tried it. He also swam next to the kids when they were swimming across the pool so they didn't feel alone and he would keep himself between the kids and the wall so they didn't try to get out. Mark also tried to keep the students happy, by playing games in the water.

A student at John Burroughs School, Mark said, "It was a challenge working with mentally disabled kids because their disabilities are all across the spectrum. All some of them want to do is hold onto you and others don't want to get near you. I liked figuring out how to help each kid. This has taught me patience and persistence. I liked working with Sarah."

Super Swimmers Academy is a year-round learn-to-swim school in St. Louis, established in 1980 by Marx. The school works with children of all abilities and levels, specializing in teaching beginners of all ages and welcome children with special needs. Sarah feels that what she is doing is important because the Torah commands us to teach our children to swim.