

Olympic Hopefuls

Larry Aldridge, Henry Huey Are "Special People"

by Tera Burns
Post Staff Writer

It's not every day we meet special people. Maybe Nov. 12 was just one of those lucky days. But there sat Larry Aldridge and Henry Huey - both students at the Metro Center school for the mentally handicapped and both have achieved outstanding recognition and awards in previous Special Olympics.

The two have been preparing all year for the upcoming Special Olympics, Nov. 14-15 at Metro Center on McDowell St., and Nov. 16 at Centennial Lanes on South Boulevard.

"I shot a lot of basketball and run track a lot in a park near my house," Larry began. "I stay in shape all year round. I don't get bored. I have to get out of the house sometimes."

As for Henry, running is an everyday thing. "I run around the block." How many miles? "About five." To stay in shape? "Yes."

But what motivates these young men to participate in the Special Olympics? "It's kinda fun. I like winning the trophies. I can show my friends and all and meet the cheerleaders," Larry said.

And Henry, sitting proudly in his chair stated frankly, "We won championship."

Indeed they are champions. Larry has won 25 ribbons and Henry has won 10 ribbons and 2 medals at other Special Olympics events.

Their most recent victory was at the last state-wide Special Olympics. They won the 4-40 relay.

To Larry and Henry winning is "alright" and "pretty good." And one can't mistake the excitement these young men possess by being involved in the Special Olympics.

But more than just excitement is produced according to Bill Moss and Francine Ballard, co-coordinators for the Special Olympics and teachers at the Metro-Centers vocational high school.

Moss said the "National research has shown that the Special Olympics improves their performance in class."

Larry agrees. "It makes me do my home work a lot."

In addition "The Special Olympics give self confidence and self worth," according to Ballard.

Winning did make Henry feel "real happy."

So maybe that's what the Special Olympics is all about-making people happy. The events are made up to fit the child. For instance, instead of basketball, wheelchair and lower functioning students throw bean bags into a basket.

According to Ballard, "We don't make them fit into our activities, our activities are geared to his interest and abilities. No child is left out."

One more speciality of the Special Olympics is that everyone is a winner.

"On any level we give ribbons or medals for first, second and third places, but participation ribbons are given to all students," Ballard explained.

Anyone can participate because in Mecklenburg County there is no age limit; wide the minimum age limit is 8 years.

Since the Special Olympics is expecting 750 participants Nov. 14-16, volunteers are needed.

"Once you see it and work with it, it's so easy to get involved," Ballard said.

The Special Olympics is held on a local Mecklenburg County level; area competitions, involving seven counties; state-wide competition; and every four years, international competition.

Local competitions are held year round with ice skating and snow skiing competitions in the winter and soccer, track and field and swimming competitions in the spring.

After the events of the Special Olympics are over the Metro Center students return to their classes and the sometimes harsh reality faced by the mentally handicapped.

According to Ballard the 385 students at Metro Center have I.Q.'s ranging between 30 and 50, and sometimes face discrimination.

"Feelings of personal discrimination effects the higher functioning students," Ballard said. "But we try to teach the students that 'yes, there are people who'll make fun of you.' We try to emphasize positive aspects 'that you do have a contribution to make'."

A difficult task in teaching the mentally handicapped according to Moss is "Working with their attitudes about job training. It's difficult to make them understand that they've got to be on time for work, or give a good reason for not being there."

But working as a mentally handicapped teacher is rewarding also. "Helping them feel pride in their accomplishments and feeling good about themselves for the first time," is rewarding for Ballard.

As for Moss, "The Special Olympics is the most rewarding."

Both Moss and Ballard advise to become a successful teacher of the mentally handicapped you must



Special Olympics is more than just games to the participants.

have a "sense of humor."

"You must fight against 'poor little retarded kids - what can I do to help him.' The most important thing is not to pity the kid but teach him to

be independent," Moss said.

And one final comment by Ballard: "See him as a person, not a retarded person."



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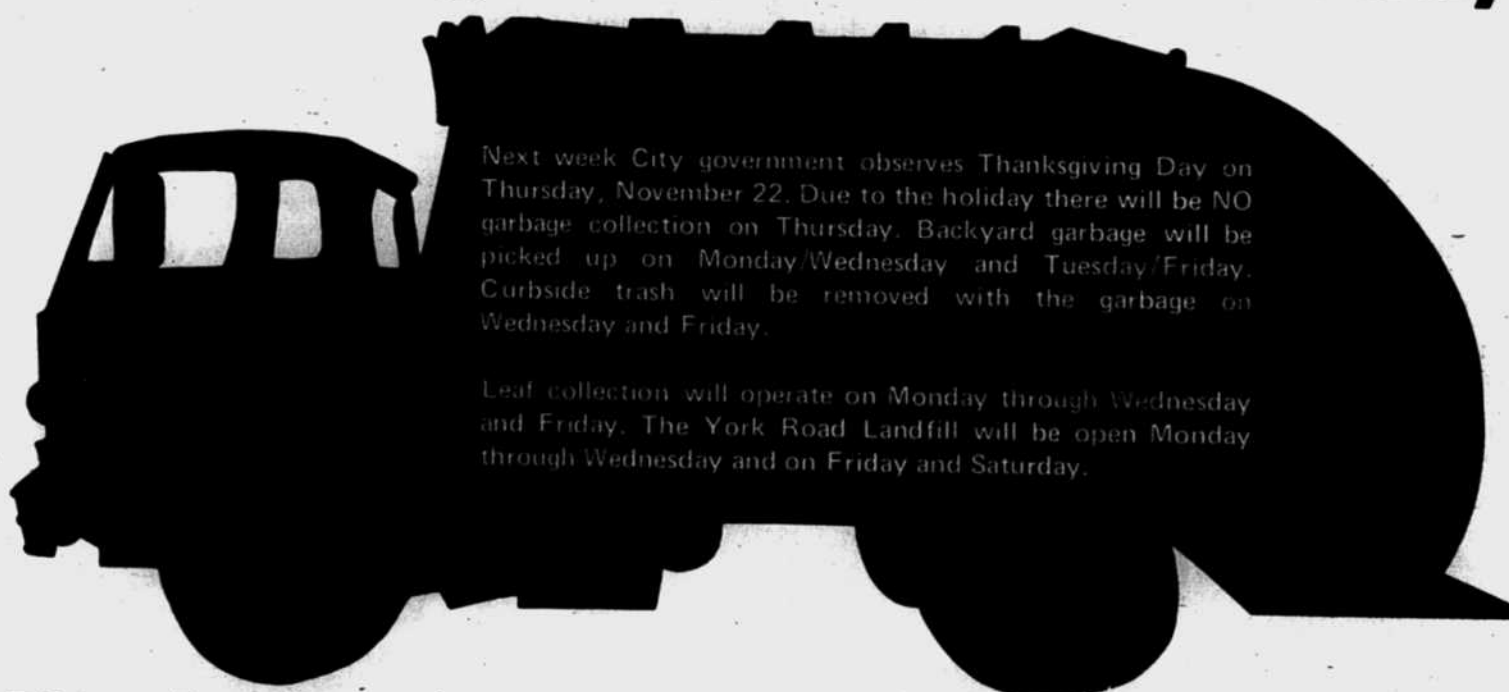
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No Garbage Collection on Thursday



Next week City government observes Thanksgiving Day on Thursday, November 22. Due to the holiday there will be NO garbage collection on Thursday. Backyard garbage will be picked up on Monday/Wednesday and Tuesday/Friday. Curbside trash will be removed with the garbage on Wednesday and Friday.

Leaf collection will operate on Monday through Wednesday and Friday. The York Road Landfill will be open Monday through Wednesday and on Friday and Saturday.

Thanksgiving is a holiday for Sanitation crews



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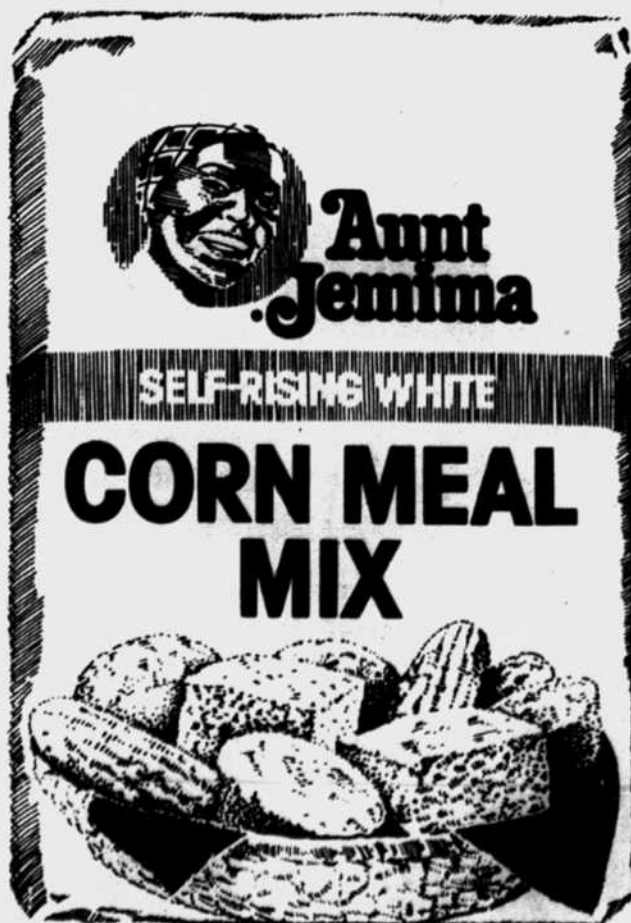
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