

Red Cross program helps disabled learn to swim

By LAURIE PELLICHERO

Special to The Times

For more than 25 years, the American Red Cross of Central New Jersey has operated Adapted Aquatics programs in Hamilton. The goal of Adapted Aquatics is to teach individuals with physical and mental disabilities the importance of safety, how to swim and especially to have fun.

Each year, Red Cross volunteer instructors teach more than 50 individuals with disabilities to swim. The Adapted Aquatics program provides participants with an opportunity to meet challenges, experience success, work with others and become part of a social group. The water exercise also helps them utilize muscles that restrict movement on land. The students are able to improve strength, coordination and range of movement.

The program is free to area families. Participants range in age from 3 to 88. Volunteers work one-on-one with the swimmer to help teach survival skills, stroke development and build self-confidence.

Bill Andersen of Princeton Junction,

now a volunteer with the program, said, "Our son Peter started in the Red Cross Adapted Aquatics program in Hamilton in 1993. He was 15 years old. Peter

is mentally retarded and has cerebral palsy. The staff welcomed Peter and worked with him patiently. He is a very slow learner but he is diligent, and over time Peter's swimming did improve. Peter looked forward to each Tuesday when Bob Ice, a veteran volunteer, would give him one-on-one encouragement as he slowly gained strength and ability. Eventually, he was able to swim the length of the pool."

"The late Jane Adams, founder of the program, took a special interest in Peter, praising him at every small step, even to the point of entering him in program contests and then Special Olympics events. Peter would always come in last, but he could be depended upon to complete his lap. The cheers from the spectators were thunderous, and Peter



was thrilled that those around him were pleased with his efforts," said Andersen.

"Red Cross Adapted Aquatics reached out to Peter as a person with

only a little prospect of improvement. The volunteers developed that small spark so that now Peter is a better swimmer and a more confident young adult. May the program last forever, so as to touch and benefit as many of the Peters of the world as it can find," Andersen said.

Funds from this year's Times' Holiday Appeal will be used to support the services and programs of the American Red Cross of Central New Jersey.

To make a donation in support of the American Red Cross of Central New Jersey, please make your check payable to The Times Holiday Appeal and mail or hand deliver it to: 500 Perry St., Box 847, Trenton, N.J. 08605. To make a donation online, visit www.njredcross.org. All gifts will be acknowledged and ano-

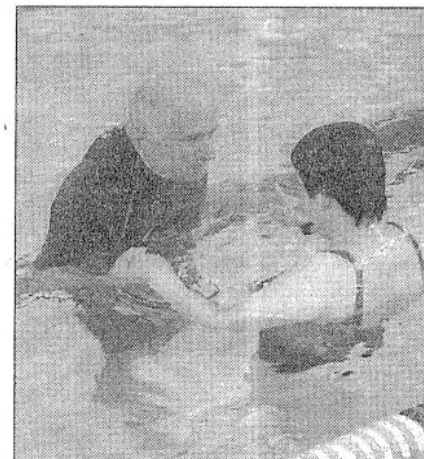


Photo courtesy of Red Cross of Central New Jersey
Volunteer Bill Andersen instructs a student in the Red Cross Adapted Aquatics program at Nottingham High School in Hamilton.

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For more information about the Adapted Aquatics program, call the American Red Cross of Central New Jersey at (609) 951-8550.