

Our schools are at the heart of the community: Dr. Russell

Each year, the Owego Apalachin Central School District maintains its close relationship with the surrounding community in a variety of ways. One such way is to allow community use of the district facilities, most of which are at no cost.

Perhaps the most high-profile program which is open to members of the OA community, free of charge, is the Community Swim Program.

Over the past several years, Jason Westervelt, district aquatic director and varsity swim coach for both the girls and boys teams, has been at the helm of just about everything pertaining to the pool.

Westervelt recently reported to the OA Board of Education that all the swim programs, school and community related, are exceeding all his expectations and progressing toward the ultimate goal of being the best all-around swim program in Section IV.

Westervelt listed a number of accomplishments and accolades regarding the swim program here, not the least of which being the fact that OA is one of just three schools in the area that offer community swim.

"We're the only school pool open to the whole community (not just the district)," Westervelt said.

"We have hundreds of visitors to Owego families who use our facility over the summer. Our pool is open to the community (in most cases) seven days a week, 12 months a year. No other pool in Section IV offers this service. We have also surpassed swim hours offered by the majority of YMCAs in the area.

"We offer lap swimming and open swim; no other school pool offers both," he said. "Open swim allows the patrons to use diving boards and swimming aides."

He added that OA currently has 21 lifeguards in the school district, and the majority of them work for the school district.

"I cannot tell you how much of an impact a lifeguard job has on a young teen," Westervelt said.

"As coaches, teachers and parents, we try to instill the importance of responsibility in our children. This job has done that for them. These teenage kids have handled every situation quickly, accurately and professionally."

OA's school swim teams have been very successful (the boys have eight sectional championships and the girls now have three, the most recent one earlier this month), due largely in part to the community swim program, elementary swim, and the Greater Owego Swim Team (GOST), Westervelt said.

"All our programs have grown and become much stronger," he said. "The GOST team is one of the strongest and most stable swim clubs in the league,



Stephen Jensen photo

Who's Using Our Schools?

Members of the community, whether representing a business, an organization, teams or individuals, over the last two years have used the Owego Apalachin school facilities - most of them at no charge - a total of 2,038 hours. The following is a list of organizations that have used our facilities:

- A New Hope Center
- A Step Ahead
- ADSIP
- AESPG
- American Red Cross
- American Cancer Society
- Apalachin Fire Department
- Apalachin Landowners Group
- Apalachin Youth Football League
- AYAA
- Broome-Tioga BOCES
- BOCES Tioga Learning Center
- Bovis Construction
- Boy Scouts
- Boys and Girls Club
- Broome County Attorney General's Office
- Broome Tioga Special Olympics
- BTAEOP
- Camp Ahwaga
- Club Positive
- Coalition for Better Schools in Tioga County
- Cub Scouts Pack 32
- District 7170 Rotary Club
- Dr. Perestam
- Edward Jones Financial
- Eyota Fastpitch, Inc.
- Family Literacy Network
- Family Reading Partnership
- FCCLA
- Owego Fire Department
- Foundation for Excellence
- Garden Club
- Girl Scout Troop 115
- Girl Scout Troop 413
- Girl Scout Troop 861
- Girl Scout Troop 264
- Girl Scouts—Daisies 1033
- GODS Diving Club
- Greater Owego Swim Team
- Group Workcamps Foundation
- GTC LEAH
- Hiawatha Soccer Association
- Hover (music band)
- Ind. Oil and Gas Association of New York
- Interact Club
- Ithaca Club Softball
- Jordan Schreiner
- Jostens
- Kathy Hansen School of Dance
- Literacy Volunteers of Broome/Tioga
- Lockheed Martin
- NYSCATE
- NYSPHSAA Section IV Athletic Admin. Assoc.
- OA Foundation
- OA Music Boosters
- OA Sports Booster Club
- OES PTO
- Owego Bus. and Prof. Women's Club
- Owego Community Swim
- Owego Indoor Hockey
- Owego Jr. Football League
- Owego Little League Baseball
- Owego Pee Wee Wrestling
- Owego Post 401 American Legion
- Owego Teener League Baseball
- Owego Town Board
- Owego Women's Softball League
- Owego Youth Basketball
- Owego Youth Football
- Perestam Chiropractic
- Quarterstix 16u Softball
- Quarterstix 18u Softball
- Rafel Grigoriens School of Dance
- RBI Baseball
- Rotary Club
- Scholarship Challenge
- Section IV Lacrosse
- Senior Softball - 70 Plus
- Southern Tier Adult Baseball League
- Southern Tier Lacrosse
- Special Olympics
- Sunset Photo/Oakdale Images
- Susquehanna Chapter, NYS Women Inc.
- TALL
- TCYSA
- Tioga Adult Learning (BOCES)
- Tioga Co. Coalition for Better Schools
- Tioga County Board Of Elections
- Tioga County Boys/Girls Club
- Tioga County Council on the Arts
- Tioga County Economic Development
- Tioga County Land Owners Assoc.
- Tioga County Landowners Group
- Tioga County Personnel & Civil Service Office
- Tioga Opportunites
- Tioga United Way
- Town of Owego
- UNAC Swim Club
- USTA Adult League
- VESID
- Win City Volleyball Club
- Work Camp
- Yes Leads

the GODS diving club has qualified seven divers for age group nationals, the OFA varsity swim teams both won a sectional title in 2009-2010, and the girls just won another won this fall, while our elementary and middle school students have drastically improved their swimming ability."

For example, Westervelt said, last year there were only seven students in the sixth grade who could not swim a full length

in deep water. Two of those seven were transfer students.

"The good news is that the fifth-graders were even better," he added.

None of the district's special needs students in grades 6-12 need to swim in shallow water only, and 95 percent of them use the pool in the summer with Camp Ahwaga, Westervelt added.

Dick Franz is a widely respected figure in the Owego

community. He said he has several ties to community use of school district facilities. There's a family connection to the swim program, as his wife makes use of the pool at OFA on a weekly basis. But there's plenty more.

"The Owego Little League uses the southwest corner of the elementary school property in Owego where we have a joint venture with the schools," said Franz. "We built a hardball facility there and use it for Teener

Baseball June, July and August. There's a county league for the kids in between Little League and American Legion ball, and Owego and Apalachin have two teams each in that league.

"The school district cares for the property and we take care of inside the structures," he said. "We've been doing this for 20 years, but more so in the last four years or so."

Franz is also affiliated with a senior men's softball program that uses OA fields for play. He said three leagues - for senior men over the ages of 55, 65 and 70 - have used the fields in years past.

"Presently we use two fields in the months of May, June, July and mid-August for 65-plus," Franz said. "Mario's Pizza in Owego sponsors that team of 18 players, and they're associated with the Central New York League, with teams that come here from Syracuse, Binghamton, Elmira, Endicott. There are eight teams in the league, and during the course of a season, 125 individuals over the age of 65 utilize that facility.

"The over-70 team is sponsored by Peak Performance, another Owego business, and that team also has about 18 players," Franz said. "They play in the same program as the other team.

"It's a highly competitive league for older guys and it's statewide. We're very fortunate to be accommodated by the local school district.

"If we didn't have the arrangement with the schools? We wouldn't have anything," Franz added. "There are no other fields available, and that includes the fairgrounds."

Franz said that OA takes excellent care of its facilities.

"Just knowing that you have a safe facility for us to play on says a lot," he said. "When you have men 65 years old, you don't want them running in holes, and I know Dr. (Bill) Russell (OA superintendent) is personally interested.

"Also Tony Clark (OA maintenance supervisor) is to be commended on his awareness of our schedule and the care of those fields," Franz said. "I could go on about that, as I'm involved in so many sporting events. I see a lot of events and the fields are always well kept.

"I can't say enough good things about it. And that goes for the guys who we play with, too. They're very complimentary of the OA staff."

"Our schools are at the heart of our community," said Dr. Bill Russell, OA superintendent. "Just look at how groups and individuals use our facilities on a regular basis."

"I'm a fan of Dr. Russell," Franz added. "He's brought a lot to the community and he's been very involved. He pays attention to detail. He's a great ambassador for the Owego district."