



Heritage Story

Hello! I am Karen Mengersen

(Karen became a parent rep on the Olds & District Special Olympics in 1995, when her son Mark joined the organization as an athlete. She went on to become Chair in 2003 and has been in the position ever since - and has changed a lot of lives through the years!)



When Mark was born with Down Syndrome, Karen and her late husband Ernest went to conferences and met lots of families in their efforts to understand and provide for Mark's needs. "I knew I could make a difference for him and wanted to take him as far as I could. But his personality is so outgoing and lovely that everyone is drawn to him anyway, and that creates so many opportunities for him. He is having a good life - we're having a good life together."

Karen's commitment to all four of her children led her to many different community roles, from volunteering at the local school for students with unique needs to helping launch the CanSkate program for young children in Olds. She took part in the 25th anniversary Rick Hansen 'Man in Motion' run in 2012 and has been taking part in a singalong group at the Olds Hospital every week for the last 35 years! But, despite her many volunteer roles, it was becoming Chair of the Olds & District Special Olympics that had the greatest impact on their lives. The district affiliate includes the communities of Didsbury, Carstairs, Sundre, Innisfail, Bowden and Olds. Eighteen coaches and volunteers combine their efforts to offer an array of sporting events for athletes in 11 different sports - in both Summer and Winter Olympic Games!

"Everyone jokes that they shouldn't look me in the eye or they'll be helping with Special Olympics! To be honest, it's not difficult to get people to help and we have a really engaged community. They know the huge benefits to these athletes - behind their challenges, they are people who want and deserve to be happy."

Karen is happy when she's able to spend time in her huge backyard in Olds. The family home is on a uniquely large plot of land - much of which was used to plant a huge vegetable garden for nearly 25 years. Karen would grow and preserve food from spring until winter! Even though she doesn't plant such a big garden anymore, she still harvests many delicious raspberries from her plants and six apple trees for jams and juices to enjoy all year long. She is such a fan of homegrown and preserved fruits that her apple jelly was featured in a 1993 edition of Canadian Living!

Karen's Famous Recipe! Apple Jelly



The secret to my recipe is that I grow all my apples in my backyard! But you can use apples from the farmers' market or grocery store, of course.

I peel and then steam-juice them with a bit of honey until the juice pours out. Then I add some Certo.

There's not much fussing around my kitchen! I just followed this simple preparation and ended up being featured in a national magazine! I love coming up with easy ways to preserve fruits and vegetables throughout the growing season. I feel a sense of comfort knowing there is a stock of healthy food in my cellar.