

Sheri D'Ambrose
INSPIRA Distinguished Service Awards
Faculty/Licensed Staff category – Award of Excellence

Once a year, the field house at Addison Trail High School is transformed into the ultimate track and field event with a long jump and a sprinting area; the studio theatre is turned into a karaoke concert; and the gym is filled with moon jumps and games.

That transformation takes place for the West Suburban Conference (WSC) Sports Spectacular. Founded in 1994 by a group of WSC athletic directors, the day is meant to give students with special needs an opportunity to participate in various athletic activities.

About 10 years ago, Addison Trail physical education teacher Sheri D'Ambrose took on hosting that event with a vision of adding more activities to include even more students and to make the day a fun-filled celebration. When you step inside the WSC Sports Spectacular, you're met with cheers of excitement from students, and high fives and smiles are all around. There's a buzz of excitement in the air, and a feeling of camaraderie fills the room. A group of people helps with the event, and D'Ambrose is at the center, coordinating all aspects to make sure her vision becomes a reality each year. D'Ambrose leads and organizes:

- More than 100 volunteers (including Addison Trail students, staff and parents)
- Donations from local businesses for food and refreshments
- Donations from Great Lakes Apparel for T-shirts
- Donations from Trophies By George for participant awards
- Donations from A Moon Jump 4U
- Free disc jockey services provided by BOOM Entertainment

The event also involves support from the DuPage High School District 88 and Addison Trail administration, NovaCare Rehabilitation (which provides athletic training services to Addison Trail) and Addison Trail's Student Council and Art Club

"I just love seeing the smiles on the students' faces," D'Ambrose said. "To give these students a day that's happy and upbeat, where they can just have fun and participate in activities they might otherwise never get to try, is so important and such an amazing feeling. There's nothing like it."

D'Ambrose added one of the aspects she loves most about the event is it's always evolving to enhance the experience for students. She said she's considering implementing annual themes for the day in the future, to add another element of fun and participation.

Addison Trail senior Alyssa Ramir volunteered with the event last year and looks forward to helping D'Ambrose again this May.

"I worked with special education students in Ms. D'Ambrose's class as a Junior PE Leader last year and also helped in her special education class this year," Ramir said. "It's super rewarding to see how excited they get when they participate in the WSC Sports Spectacular and how much pride they have. Ms. D'Ambrose does a tremendous job running this event, and I'm thrilled at the opportunity to help her."

Ramir added assisting with the event has opened her eyes to something she never thought she would be part of planning.

"You see the challenges these students face, and it's great to watch them enjoy a day where they truly are the stars," Ramir said.

One of those students is junior George Pappas-Papaioannou, who is excited to participate in his third WSC Sports Spectacular this spring. He said his favorite activity is the basketball tournament, and he suggested to D'Ambrose they also add floor hockey this year.

"Ms. D'Ambrose really helps us during the event and makes it a lot of fun for all of us," Pappas-Papaioannou said. "What I like most is getting to be with my friends."

Addison Trail Principal Michael Bolden said the WSC Sports Spectacular has become an annual staple for the entire Conference.

"D'Ambrose invites all 14 high schools in the West Suburban Conference to be part of this event, and they all look forward to it each year," Bolden said. "On that day, our halls are filled with more than 700 students making new friends, participating in athletics and having fun. Embracing all students is what Addison Trail is all about, and we're thrilled Ms. D'Ambrose continues to share our Blazer Pride with our fellow school districts through this event."