

CHILDS

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overwhelmed by the whole team, and a team is only as good as their leader, and Tammy's the best."

Pathfinder school nurse Teena Kuhl said Childs goes above and beyond being a teacher.

"She's not just a teacher, she's a caregiver also," Kuhl said. "We have kids with seizures, she's right down there timing seizures and checking to make sure they're okay. ... I'm so blessed that I could be the main nurse in her classroom, because it's just wonderful."

ISD Superintendent Teresa Belote also joined in the praise of Childs.

"I got to do a site visit over at Pathfinder as a relative newbie in Sturgis, and I was blown away by this woman. I thought, 'when I grew up, I want to be just like Tammy,'" Belote said. "I think everybody that's around Tammy wants to be a better person because of what she brings to the table, what she brings to the building, what she brings to the county, and she impacts people beyond the scope that she would ever guess. We just love her."

Childs was then presented with a certificate of excellence in recognition of her nomination, with the entirety of the board giving her a standing ovation. She thanked the board, saying it's not just her that makes what she does possible.

"It's truly not just one person, it's a whole village that makes this happen," Childs said. "From the students and parents to the families, all people that are supporting me all the way, it's all of us together, it's not just me."

Board President Elizabeth O'Dell thanked Childs for what she does, and noted that it is rare for an ISD board to stand in appreciation of someone during an entire presentation.

"Never once have I seen our board stand for an entire presentation," O'Dell said. "We honor you and we're so honored to have you working for the ISD."

The grand prize winner of the National LifeChanger of the Year award will receive \$10,000, which would be split as a \$5,000 cash award and a \$5,000 donation to the winner's school/district. Four grand prize finalists will receive \$5,000, split as a \$2,500 cash award and \$2,500 to the school/district, and 10 LifeChanger awards will receive \$3,000 split evenly between the winner and the school/district.

In addition, the LifeChanger "whose community demonstrates the most support for their nomination" receives the LifeChanger Spirit Award, which includes \$5,000 with the \$2,500 splits.

Award winners are expected to be selected in early 2020. Childs' nomination page can be found at lifechangeroftheyear.com.

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GRIFFIN

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tennis, volleyball and golf. A knee injury, however, forced her to quit the track team. She won the award for outstanding female athlete of her graduating class. After graduating, she coached volleyball and played tennis in the summers, which kept her in shape.

She married her first husband in 1982 and had knee surgery shortly before giving birth to her son.

"I gained 20 pounds," she says. "Then I had my daughter 21 months later. I was probably a good 50 pounds overweight and never lost it. As soon as my daughter turned one year old, I had to buy big clothes. I was in the store and said to myself, 'I'm not buying this size anymore—I'm working out every morning and going on a diet. I was in my late 20s.'"

Over the course of two years she dropped 50 pounds, mainly through diet. "I totally changed what I ate. Not that I ate a lot of bad food, but I wasn't as careful. I switched to salads. That's my go-to meal—vegetables and salads. You need to exercise and diet, but diet is most important of the two. You can exercise all day long, but if you eat junk you'll gain weight."

Like many mothers, raising children while working didn't leave time for much else. "I didn't get a lot of sleep. Back then I'd exercise by following along to different TV shows like Body by Gilad and Denise Austin workouts. I would get up and do the 5 a.m. ones while my kids were sleeping."

She also taught step aerobic classes at a small fitness center in Three Rivers (no longer in business) and within a year earned a certification to teach classes. A few years after HealthTrac opened in 1997, she began teaching there.

In addition, she found ways to squeeze in time for fitness whenever and wherever she could. "My kids were big into tennis. While they played at West Hills Athletic Club in Kalamazoo I would work out at the gym there."

For conditioning, she occasionally ran a mile or so. "In 2003, a friend of mine said let's run the 10k offered by HealthTrac. I was 39 years old and didn't have a clue how to pace myself."

She gradually learned that critical aspect of long-distance running and was off to the races—literally. "It's funny, you just get started—that's the toughest part—and then you find you can go a little farther, you can run a little faster, and you enjoy being with friends doing the same thing."

In 2004, she ran her first half marathon in Indianapolis. The following year she ran the Grand Rapids River Bank Run, a distance of 25 kilometers. "I had never run 15 miles before. Then friends got me to run the Traverse City marathon two weeks later. I had been training for the half, but not the full marathon. I did well, but I was so incredibly sore—I couldn't walk down stairs for a week. It was terrible. I said when I finished I'm never doing that again. But a week later I was already planning my next one."

Last year, she completed six full marathons. She ran her sixth Boston Marathon in April. Leg cramps prevented her from finishing under four hours by five seconds.

"The prettiest marathon I have done is Big Sur in California where you run on Highway 1. It's very hilly, but beautiful."

Most recently, she qualified and received an invitation to the inaugural Abbott World Marathon Majors Wanda Age Group World Championships in London next April—right on the heels of the Boston Marathon. "I've done back to marathons before, but this will be a new experience."

She's not a swimmer, so for now an Ironman triathlon is out. But she competes in duathlons—biking and running—and team triathlons with HealthTrac instructor and marathon running mate Julie Allen.

Kathy has taken several long-distance bike tours, including cycling up the coastline to the Mackinac Bridge, a 343 mile trip over 3.5 days.

She is adamant about the benefits of exercise, whether it is training for a race, attending a group fitness class or simply enjoying a brisk walk. "Fitness is a major part of my life. It definitely helps mentally. Studies show people are more productive at work. It keeps your brain sharper and makes you feel better overall. A lot of people say, 'Oh, I'm too tired after work to work out.' But, it actually gives you more energy. On days when I skip it, my brain is not as focused and I don't wake up with the energy I need. I feel in a fog. I tell people, working out becomes a habit. Your body is made to move and you need to move."

For some women, getting into a fitness routine may require overcoming certain mental challenges as well. "One thing women do—and I'm the same way—is feel guilty taking time away from the family to go off and do something on your own.

Even now that my kids are grown I feel that way, but my husband is great about it and encourages me to do things I love to do. My advice is not to feel guilty—take that time for yourself, otherwise you're going to be depressed."

Kathy has worked 22 years for the 45th Judicial Circuit Court in Centreville.

Currently as court administrator, she is responsible for all case scheduling and government reporting requirements. "The most challenging part of my job is human resources issues. There's really no down time. Felony cases are increasing every year. Tempers and emotions can flare up. Thank goodness we have good security. Unfortunately, people come to court stressed out—divorce, law suits, losing parental rights."

She typically works 40 hours per week, but puts in far more time volunteering with the National Association for Court Management, an organization that provides continuing education and training in her field. She also serves as vice president on the association's board of directors, and is currently the vice president.

Kathy has experienced her share of injuries and health issues. She must cope with rheumatoid arthritis and had hip surgery three years ago. "After my operation, I couldn't do anything for eight weeks and I was on crutches and depressed." She also experienced three stress fractures in her foot. At one point, frustrated with her lack of mobility, she fashioned a cage on her bike to accommodate a foot cast so she could continue to cycle.

"If my husband says, 'Take it easy, you do too much,' I remind him how depressed I was when I couldn't work out."

Camaraderie with other women on the go is of primary importance to her. "It's time to talk. That's the great thing. More important than the physical aspect is the friends I've made teaching classes, training for events and running."

She points out the alarming rise in obesity and reliance on medications as another key reason she works diligently to stay fit. "Our society is lazy—people don't even get up to change the TV. There are a lot of diseases out there you can't control, but you may not need as much medicine and might keep that disease at bay longer if you work out."

Her motto—"Enjoy life and take nothing for granted"—was formed in part when her daughter developed a brain tumor at age five. It was both a traumatic and eye-opening experience. "She was in intensive care 11 days after surgery. I didn't even know if she was ever going to look normal again. My daughter had to share a room with a little girl who had leukemia and was crying. You would listen to her at night, lying there crying. It was terrible. There's always someone who's worse off."

Running and biking, she says, afford her an opportunity to cut through

PHOTO PROVIDED
Kathy cruising to win her age division at this year's Kalamazoo Marathon. "Running clears my mind. Half the time I'm thinking about how lucky I am."

the clutter and contemplate things that matter most in life. "Running clears my mind. Half the time I'm thinking about how lucky I am. I think about how good I have it. I look around at nature and feel gratitude. It's amazing how much you see biking and running outside. I'll see something and say, wow, I never noticed that before."

She advises women to find at least a half hour for vigorous exercise each day. "You'll find it's going to give you more time because you're going to have more energy than if you didn't do it. Group classes are a great way to meet people and exercise at the same time—and the social aspect will keep you accountable."

She also recommends exercising before work, errands, caring for children and a host of other tasks and distractions fill up the day. "After a week of getting up early it becomes habit—it's those first few days that are tough, the hardest part is just getting to the gym. You're going to get energy and be more productive at work. You'll feel better all day long and feel better knowing you did something."

"I read a study that says exercise is better at preventing dementia than mind games and puzzles. People who work out were 57 percent more likely not to get it. Dementia is on the rise. I wonder if that's because we are less active as a society."

She also underscores the importance of exercise as a means of forming and maintaining a more positive outlook on life in general, and how it better equips a person to handle hardships and emotional trials when they arise. "People need to get outside more, because it does create more of a positive attitude. It makes you realize how lucky you are. If you're going through a crisis, and

you don't get out, you're going to sit around thinking about how bad things are instead of thinking about how good things are. If you're not busy with something, you're going to feel sorry for yourself. I mean, even through bad times you have good things to focus on."

Kathy notes that while a fitness routine and competing in races—some of them requiring extensive travel—can cause "some tension" in a relationship, good communication is key. "My husband knows after a couple of my injuries that it's depressing when I can't work out. I get moody. I'm going to be in a better frame of mind if I can work out."

Married to her second husband for 13 years, she laughs recalling their initial time together. "The year we were dating I ran my first marathon. He tells the story to everybody that he came to my office to ask me out and my response was I run a lot—I know I wouldn't say that! It was two weeks before my second half marathon. Our first date was the end of April and the end of May was my first full marathon. I was in training mode. So, now, he tells me to go out and have fun with my friends."

Kathy's view of life comes through in the meditation portion at the end of Body Flow, the yoga-based class she teaches at HealthTrac. After leading a focused stretching and strength-balance session, she dims the lights in the facility's aerobic center and invites participants to lie down and begin to clear their mind. She speaks softly to guide them into a peaceful state of relaxation. "Contemplate the wonders of your body—the fact that you are here, now, alive and well."



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