THE LIFELONG TEACHER

Guided by his passion to touch the lives of every person he encounters, RICHARD SKELTON is a man of pure heart.

By JESSIE JOHNSON
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Growing up in the northwest region of Illinois, Richard Skelton has sought to make a name for himself not only that he could be proud of, but that distinguished him as a man of exemplary character.

Throughout his youth, he had an inherent love of sports and was constantly active, whether it was in a local pick-up game, riding the bike on his paper route or shoveling snow during the Midwest winters. When he entered high school, he was able to share his passion when he became the sports columnist for the local newspaper.

When family tradition put him on a path to work at the local steel mill, Skelton envisioned something different for his future. He gained a strong work ethic and set of values from the his co-workers at the mill, but was also inspired to set higher goals and achieve bigger dreams than he could in small town Illinois.

As an all-around athlete, he has always had a strong competitive spirit and sense of pride that enabled him to develop skills in all kinds of sports, including baseball, football, golf, basketball and track. In 1950, Skelton was the Mile Champion on his high school track team, an accolade that garnered him the attention of Northern Illinois University and a four-year athletic scholarship.

During his time at Northern Illinois, he was recognized as one of the top 10 runners in the country when he became the Midwest and IAC Conference Mile Champ. His athletic achievement also earned him recognition as a two-time NAIA All-American.

In order to continue his training during the harsh winters of northern Illinois, the university provided him with an “indoor track trainer” in the basement of the university field house, making him one of the first distance runners in the United States to train on a treadmill.

His promising career gave him notoriety among many of his peers. The skills gained from his time as a student athlete inspired him to help others by becoming a coach in the sports of football, basketball, baseball and track.

After graduating from college, he coached for two years before getting drafted into the military. He was proud to serve his country, and at the age of 22, he entered the Army, Capitalizing on his athletic and coaching background, the Army assigned him stateside to coordinate the Army’s sports program for the Northeastern United States.

In 1967, Skelton relocated to Florida and began his lifelong calling as an educator, where he taught and coached children of all ages for 42 years. With a passion for the game of chess, he consistently mentored his students and athletes to “play chess with your life.” Constantly set goals, plan out your moves as you would on a chessboard and move ahead.”

This mantra Skelton has for his life has helped develop his sense of determination, problem solving and teaching. He was able to use this most actively being as a single parent to two sons.

Although he has touched many lives and received many accolades, he is most proud of what he considers his most significant accomplishment: raising two successful sons in whom he was able to instill drive, motivation and the talent to teach and seek enjoyment in one’s life work. Being a single parent gave him great strength. He was very active with his children as both a coach and a mentor as they developed as athletes themselves.

Skelton fondly recalls the hours they spent together on the baseball field, golf course, tennis courts and any other field where they could keep score. Although both sons are now grown, they remain active and still call upon those skills developed in their youth. Today, it’s golf and baseball, and yes, they still play chess. They credit their father for their competitive spirit and continue to look forward to the friendly games they have when visiting their dad.

Now retired and living at the beautiful establishment of Independence Hill Retirement Community in Stone Oak, Skelton spends his time writing about his experiences and lessons learned as an athlete. He also enjoys spending time with his sons, and he still plays a mean game of chess.

One of the true elements of his character can be seen when he is either engaged in the game of chess with his sons or teaching the game at Independence Hill. He has the distinct gift of playing right hand left hand, which enables him to play both sides of the chessboard by himself.

Skelton enjoys his time at Independence Hill, which offers more amenities than a traditional retirement facility. The balanced meals, positive energy, friendly environment and compassionate staff make it a comfortable and enjoyable living environment for him and all who live there.

Skelton is truly a one-of-a-kind individual whose infectious spirit commands the attention of anyone in the room. The kindred spirit within him helps “create the environment” for family wherever he is, and his ‘organized, precise, well-thought and methodical approach’ makes him a valuable competitor and ally on both on and off the field.

This ALL-AROUND ATHLETE has always had a STRONG COMPETITIVE SPIRIT and sense of pride.

Independence Hill Retirement Resort Community at Stone Oak is located at 30010 Kucharin Road. For more information on Independence Hill, please call 210-782-9892 or visit www.independencehill.com.