

Gym Jester Fun for 52 Years!

Ask anyone who attended Saginaw's Gym Jester Gymnastics over the past 52 years and they will tell you of the fun, personal skills and great memories collected by their participation in Gym Jester programs. Helen Fry arrived in Saginaw Township to teach physical education at Chippewa Middle Schools (now Arrowwood) on a snowy January day 1961. Not even Fry had any idea at the time, that a program influencing thousands of children would evolve.



During her teaching career at Chippewa Middle School, Fry ran programs before school, during lunch times and after school in addition to scheduled classes for seventh and eighth grade girls. Along with other sport activities, Fry introduced gymnastics to her students knowing that the sport offered opportunities for fitness and fun. Fry believes that "to live is to move and to move is to live" is her motivation for working with children. For many boys and girls in the mid Michigan area, a lasting idea was born.

As time passed, Helen and Tom Fry (fellow STCS teacher/counselor now deceased) along with their sons, John and Scott Fry supervised future facilities developing the nationally recognized Gym Jester Pre-School Program, Recreational Developmental Classes, as well as United States Gymnastics competitive teams for boys and girls. Today the program is housed in their 18,700 square ft. facility located at the 323 Weiss in Saginaw. Gym Jester programs have been recognized by the US President's Council on Fitness and Sport as well as Michigan State University's Kinesiology Department.

According to Fry, a critical offering for pre-school children is the motor skill program which offers specific activities to children in gradual progressions. Classes begin with children who are walking. The Gym Jester pre-school curriculum and gym is constructed to offer all activities that become life-time skills. When children become Tumble Bees at the age of three, we add organizational skills to the curriculum. Fry said, "I can't tell you how many parents have called me, asking where to find a similar program after leaving Saginaw."

At this point, our program has become generational with parents who attended and now want to bring their children. A child's motor skills evolve before attending school. Children want to move. Unfortunately, children who arrive in kindergarten without good body management skills are already behind. Good physical management skills help to create self-esteem, confidence, health/wellness, and coping skills. All children may not be future athletes, but all children should grow into healthy, contributing adults.

Through the years Gym Jesters has sent sixteen athletes to college, many through scholarships. In addition, had a USAG National Vault Champion (Luke Bottke) and an Elite Gymnast who participated in three Championships of the USA (Holly Voorhies). At the time she was the 2nd best at vault in the country. More than thirty former Gym Jester athletes either own or work at gymnastic facilities. More than one hundred people have been employed at GJGC. "All of this is icing on the cake," according to Fry.

Today's leadership roles are filled with very qualified coaches and instructors who have huge backgrounds in terms of knowledge and experience. Gym Jesters competitive teams are led by Lynn Grant, John Fry, Scott Fry and Rich Weatherwax. Pre-school director is Christina Nestell. Along with the Fry's, classes are led by Brent Huizar, Sarah Miller and Eddie Brown. In addition, John Fry has coached the Area 22 men and women's special Olympic gymnastic team for the past fifteen years.

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