

OFF THE CLOCK

Tracy Weldon – A Shining Beacon For 17 Years

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Everyone loves their time away from work! It's a time we can put aside work responsibilities and enjoy that much loved "me time." But away from work doesn't always mean we aren't working on something. For long-time employee Tracy Weldon, some of his off hours over the years have been a laborious activity, an act of love one could say. In the beginning, this work was for his son Owen. But over the years, that love would extend to the organization itself.

For Tracy, becoming involved in The Little Light House was a way to help Owen, his son with special needs. His involvement would grow not only because of the help provided to his son, but its mission and commitment to families who were navigating life with a special needs child. They were more than a school; they were a support group. And for parents like Tracy and his wife Marci who were involved, they wanted to reciprocate and be supportive of the organization that was providing so much to so many.

It began for them in 2006 while still pregnant with Owen. Through fellow Webco employees who had utilized the school, Tracy became aware of The Little Light House and how it was helping special needs children. Unfortunately, there was a three-year waiting list. It would be just short of two years before Owen would be enrolled...but well worth the wait.

First, however, he and Marci had to learn about the organization. This introduction would consist of a tour of the facility and a video that stimulates the tear ducts as it reveals how teachers and therapists work a magic that provides small miracles within the children. The students open up to the methods and techniques, responding to a love that is in itself a lesson in learning and succeeding.

"It doesn't take someone long to see what a phenomenal place The Little Light House is. I mean they grab a hold of you right there," Tracy said. He explained that the teachers and therapists who become involved in the organization do it out of a calling to help children. Founded in Christian principles by Marcia Mitchell and Sheryl Poole in 1972, it met a need for their children and the children of other parents who were in the same situation while also filling a void in the Tulsa community. The belief has always been to put God first; and that means giving His little children the best they can offer. For over 50 years, the organization has been doing just this. For that same period, parents like Tracy and Marci have been there helping them continue to do God's work long after their children aged out.

Owen would begin school there at a year and a half of age. And from the beginning, his parents felt he was exactly where God wanted him to be. The school is completely tuition free. This is a tremendous blessing to many parents who might not be able to afford the special needs education otherwise. But for Tracy and Marci, it was not about the financial aspect, but about ensuring that

Owen had every advantage to learn and be engaged in building the future he and his parents wanted for him. The experience of the Little Light House was instrumental in providing that advantage and would leave a lasting impression for Owen and his parents.

“Once you are part of the Little Light House, you’re always part of the Little Light House,” Tracy said. The children age out at six, but that doesn’t mean the parents do. Tracy continued his involvement when he saw an opportunity to help raise money for them.

Through volleyball, Tracy would create Sand Fest. He had been involved in the sport for several years. However, marriage and family had taken center stage, and he had dropped out of it for a couple of years. But a willingness to help those who had helped his son was about to bring him back into the sport. He still had contacts within the volleyball community and reached out in hopes that a few would support his idea of hosting a tournament to raise money for the Little Light House. Tracy quipped that they “really raked them in” as they entered five teams for, the initial tournament. But it was only the beginning.

There was a momentum that was brewing. In a sense, it was as if there was a divine force keeping the ball in the air. The word got around the next year that Tracy was hosting a volleyball tournament to benefit the organization. It so happened that Tracy had a friend, Craig Davidson who he had gotten involved in volleyball around the same time he was stopping to focus on his family. In those two years of Tracy’s absence, Craig had networked quite well within the volleyball community. When he heard about what Tracy had done with hosting his first tournament, he reached out to help with what would become the second tournament. With his numerous connections, he informed Tracy he believed he could bring a lot of people into the tournament. Craig was right.

He and Tracy moved the second tournament from grass to sand, printed up flyers and attendance jumped to 30 teams, a significant increase from five the first year. Since then, it has taken off, Tracy said. In fact, they even added a junior league a few years ago. Now they run the tournament two different weekends, one for the juniors and the other for adults. The juniors alone this year brought in 60 teams. Every year, the tournament gets bigger, Tracy explained.

Webco has been incredibly supportive of Tracy’s off the clock activity. This year there were six or seven teams from Webco alone. But it was not Tracy’s involvement in the Little Lighthouse fundraiser that brought Webco’s initial support. The Webers had been financially supportive of the school long before Owen was born. Tracy relays a story about asking Mr. Weber for support for the fundraiser for the first tournament. But Mr. Weber had already heard. Before Tracy could ask, he asked Tracy if he had a moment to talk. Tracy was on his way to ask him, but Mr. Weber cut him off at the pass as it were. He modestly touched on a few events the company had helped the school with letting Tracy know in a subtle way that he had company support. It was also his way of offering help before Tracy could ask, his way of supporting the school and an employee simply because he wanted to.

“In the beginning, the intent was to help the Little Light House raise a little money. And I am not saying we raise a boatload of money now, but I feel like we make a difference,” Tracy said. He added that the Little Lighthouse is very appreciative and always excited about the tournaments when he calls them with the dates. They even ask for photos to share on their social media. It should be noted that this is not organized by the Little Light House. Tracy and the others involved in the tournaments do all of the work to raise proceeds that benefit the school.

This year marked the 17th year for the tournament. To do the math, this is eleven years since Owen aged out of the Little Light House. And still every year, Tracy devotes a portion of his free time to support an organization that meets a much-needed service to so many families. There are a lot of ways people can spend their time away from work. But for some like Tracy, the best times are not those spent working toward something for ourselves, but toward the things that are greater than ourselves. Here’s to Tracy and all those who make the most of their free time so others can bask in the miraculous rays of light emitting from that very special little lighthouse which continues to show the way to so many.