

Meet the Members

(submitted by Jane King)

In this issue of “meet the members” we will visit with two people.....a mother and daughter from Western Turnpike! Meet Lisa Sunkes (mom) and Casey Vattimo (daughter). What a pleasure to speak with them together!

Lisa was born in Albany, lived in Miami as a child then returned to the Capital District. She lived in Delmar for 35 years and is currently in Guilderland. Lisa is married and in addition to her daughter Casey, has 2 stepdaughters and 7 grandchildren!

Lisa had a 38-year career with NY State. She retired as the Director of Human Resources for the Worker’s Compensation Board but spent the majority of her state service with the Office of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation.

Lisa began golfing many, many years ago by taking classes at Hudson Valley. She describes her first few years with golf as “very challenging!” BUT she stuck with it and now really enjoys the game. She was a member at Pinehaven Country Club, and now plays out of Western Turnpike with daughter Casey.



Daughter Casey (Cannistraci) was born in Albany and grew up in Bethlehem. Casey has always loved sports and was a soccer player at SUNY Plattsburgh. She majored in print journalism, worked as a reporter immediately after college, and has spent more than 25 years now in public relations. She is currently the Senior Vice President of External Relations for Special Olympics New York. She is married and has twin daughters who are 17 years old! The girls will attend college this fall at SUNY Geneseo and UMass Dartmouth.

Casey’s golf experience started 16 years ago when she participated in a fun charity event. She quickly got the golf bug! Casey also coaches a Special Olympics golf team, the Schenectady Aces. Most of the team competes in Unified Golf, where an athlete with an intellectual disability and a partner without a disability play alternate shot. Special Olympics NY provides athletes the opportunity to play 22 sports free of charge.

This includes as many as 51,000 athletes! Amazing!

Both mother and daughter believe the friends, camaraderie, challenge, and life lessons make golf such a valuable part of their lives. Their advice for new golfers is to “stick with it” even though it’s a hard game. Secondly, have fun and enjoy it! Most special for the mother and daughter is they do this together!

“Special Olympics is a lot like NEWGA, or any competitive sports organization, in that it brings people together around a shared passion for sports and competition,” Casey says. “We all want to improve our game and win. But at the end of the day, it’s the experience and the people we’ve had it with that’s the best take away. We all know what it feels like to want to be included.”

On November 21, Casey will run into the freezing cold waters of Lake George to raise money through the Polar Plunge. She says every dollar raised goes directly toward programming for the region’s 4,000 athletes with disabilities – and she invites members to join her in making a difference. A participant does not have to totally immerse in the lake! Even 1 foot counts. Maybe we should “field a team!!”

[NEWGA members interested in joining or donating to Casey’s Polar Plunge team can do so at this link!](#)

