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Olympians aim to inspire, motivate at events

October 25, 2007

By **ESE ESAN**
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

"Go for the gold" is the message five Olympic athletes intend to bring to a Livonia event Nov. 3.

Share the Dream, the brainchild of Livonia native and Olympic athlete Sheila Taormina, is an effort to encourage people to always strive for their best.

"I knew that I was an average person," said Taormina, who won a gold medal in swimming in 1996. "I never thought that I had the capability of making the Olympics."

Like many people, she said, she "didn't have a lot of confidence."

"It took a lot of learning, different advice from people. That was my biggest obstacle -- just believing I had what it took."

At Share the Dream, Taormina, who competed in the Olympic triathlon in 2000 and 2004, along with fellow Olympians Shannon Miller (gymnastics), Angela Ruggiero (ice hockey) and Cheryl Hayworth and Natalie Woolfolk (weightlifting), hope to inspire people wishing to succeed in life, not just athletics, with tips and stories of how they became the athletes and women they are today.

"It should be an extremely uplifting and motivational event," said Barb Gamber, Livonia Recreation Center assistant facility manager. "It's a great opportunity for young girls, boys and parents to be there for these stories."

The event, sponsored in part by the City of Livonia, Livonia Public Schools and the Radisson Hotel, was originally geared toward young female athletes, but as more and more people expressed interest, it was opened to everyone.

"We want any young people to come who have goals and dreams," said Taormina, 38, who will be competing to make the 2008 Olympic modern pentathlon team.

Share the Dream participants have an opportunity to win an afternoon training session with one of the athletes at the event and prizes will be given away throughout the day. Activity registration forms must be completed to take part in this event.

"The message that we want to communicate is we're all different sizes, we have different geographical upbringings. You don't have to fit one mold to reach the Olympics or anything for that matter," said Taormina, a 1987 Stevenson High School graduate.

Share the Dream will be held at Livonia Churchill High School, 8900 Newburgh Road, from 9 a.m. to noon.

Taormina said she hopes to make this a regular event. She has already received calls from Atlanta and St. Louis to host similar events.

"It makes me proud to be back home and doing this," she said. "After this Michigan tour, it will be easier to set up in other states."

The athletes will be in Trenton on Friday and Houghton on Monday. For information on the Trenton event, call the parks and recreation department at 734-675-7300. Cost is \$5. For information on the Houghton event, call 482-8201 or visit <http://www.ccyouth.net/>. That event is free.

For tickets to the Livonia event, visit the Livonia Community Recreation Center or the Livonia Hockey Association at the Eddie Edgar Arena. Tickets purchased before the event are \$3 and \$5 at the door.

For more information, call 734-466-2411. For the activity registration form, visit <http://ci.livonia.mi.us>.

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