

## SHAWNA STOVER



I have been a part of the USAV Gateway Region program for nearly 15 years. I started out as a juniors player many moons ago, and then after college, I got involved in the adult program in the St. Louis area. For the last three years, I have been the Adult Women's Representative for the Gateway Region. I also coached at Kennedy High School for one year, and I coached a St. Charles Explosion USAV juniors team for two years.

Along with my current duties as a players' representative for the adult tournaments, I still find time to play on a women's USAV team. I help with registrations for adults (men's and women's), volunteer at weekend events, and I work with up-and-coming referees to better their skills during tournament play. I also volunteer every summer at the Spikin' It grass volleyball two-day event, one of the largest grass volleyball tournaments in the Midwest.

When "non-volleyball" people ask me why I am so involved with this sport and volunteering my time, I tell them that there really is no better feeling than to be able to give back to a sport that has given me so much. Early on,

I learned teamwork from playing volleyball and confidence, leadership, dedication, sportsmanship, and graciousness. From coaching, I learned empathy, determination, positive projection, how to be a good listener, and how to be a good role model to young players. From reffing, I learned patience—boy, did I learn a lot of patience!—and I learned conflict-management skills; the art of letting others feel good about their arguments; and what it truly means to enjoy a sport, enjoy being with friends and family, enjoy being healthy and happy, and to not take the little things too seriously.

I met my husband Dave playing volleyball, and together, we now have a beautiful, one-year-old left-handed setter (or libero) in the making for a future high school girls' team (and possibly college?). And when I look through my Rolodex of close friends, about 80% of them are involved with volleyball in some way. I count myself very lucky to have picked up a sport that has brought such great people into my life.

Volleyball is a sport that can stay with someone from infancy (you should see my daughter Irelynn spike a ball) to well into their retirement years. When I think of all that volleyball has really done for me (even on the most minute level), I can't imagine not "giving back" in some way. I realize that not every teen I coach or every adult I play with will have the same passion I have for promoting the sport, for seeing all the great after-effects it can have on a person. But for me, I enjoy "spreading the word" and hoping others realize that it's more than just numbers on a scoreboard. It's about having a passion for something, sharing that passion with others (sometimes very heatedly through a net and sometimes jovially over drinks), and it's about showing others how a sport can improve one's life in many, many ways—if you aren't afraid to make time for yourself and also make time for others through giving back.

I appreciate all that the USAV and Gateway Region have done for this sport around the country and within our area. I am honored to have been selected for this award, and I hope I can continue to promote the sport of volleyball (and all of its many benefits) for years to come.