

Once in a while a person gets lucky enough to meet someone who is a kindred spirit. Someone who makes them smile. This year's volunteer of the year is a kindred spirit. I first met Kyle and Gage's Aunt Karla at the Brandon Kids of Steel event but most of you know her from the Riding Mountain Triathlon.

When I think of the Riding Mountain Triathlon I think of Aunt Karla. The two seem to go together like bread and jam.

Aunt Karla started helping with the RMTri 6 years ago when the Westman Triumphs partnered with Dave Lyons. Ellis Crowston was the lead person for the Triumphs and Aunt Karla went along to support the club's efforts. From the start she became an invaluable asset to the race. Both Dave and Edith Lyon spoke highly of her help and the effort she gave over the race weekends. After the Triumphs ended their involvement with the race Ellis stayed with Dave and so did Aunt Karla. Over the last 6 years Karla has gone up to the lake Thursday and worked right through to Sunday evening contributing in many areas. More often than not it is in areas that require physical labour! She takes every job or task that is assigned to her very seriously and follows through to the end.

Aunt Karla spends countless hours prior to the Event weekend helping out her sister Deb and her brother-in-law Ellis to ensure that the Riding Mountain Triathlon is a success.

When I spoke to Ellis regarding Auntie Karla the response I received from him was and I quote:

"I can honestly say that Karla has contributed a significant amount of energy and support over these last 6 years. Without her I'm not sure I would have been able to continue the support I gave Dave as she was always there to fill any role asked of her."

Karla actually started helping out at Triathlons many years ago when Kyle was involved with the Kids of Steel Program. She was a permanent fixture at the Brandon Kids of Steel over the years and even when Kyle went on to High School sports Karla continued to give her time to the Triumphs race. Karla is the quintessential example of all the unsung volunteers that continually

show up to support this sport. The Aunts, Uncles, grandparents, in-laws that are not involved directly with the sport but come forward to support a relative, neighbour or friend. Without the Aunt Karlas there would not be Triathlons or Kids of Steel." end of quote

I have come to know Aunt Karla on a personal level as I have worked closely with her for the past two race seasons. She works tirelessly all day Friday helping to set up the transition and get things organized for the big events. She can be seen at the pre-race meeting at the Bowling Green ensuring that those who pre-ordered t-shirts received them and those that didn't will get a chance purchase one. She knows exactly where every t-shirt goes and keeps track of that money like a banker.

On race morning Aunt Karla is one of the first to arrive and is definitely one of the last to leave. She's there greeting volunteers and officials in the morning taking extra care to make sure that they get their radios and have coffee and a snack. In between all of this she jumps in and helps out wherever there is a need. Sometimes it is crowd control or maybe it's directing racers through the bike entry chute or even finding the Gatorade for the volunteers that need to mix up more liquid refreshments for the racers. When the last competitor crosses that finish line, when many of the other racers have long gone, Auntie Karla is there cheering them in and then she heads off to the Theatre to pass out the door prize tickets and do any running around that is necessary. Her day is still not over because there are many things in transition that need to be packed up for the evening and you guessed it, Aunt Karla is there helping out. The entire time that she's on her feet and out in that sun she's not worrying about herself she's worrying about Ellis and Deb and what she can do to help them out even more.

Aunt Karla gives hours of her time to the Triathlon Community ensuring that they have a top-notch race event to attend. She works tirelessly and when I asked her how or why she got involved she simply said to help out Ellis and Deb. When I thanked her for hours of volunteer work she says "No thanks for me just thanks to you."

Well Karla, tonight it is my turn to say "No thanks for me just THANKS to you!"