

## **Headline: A high school girls lacrosse team, led by a Murphy, makes a boy's life so much better**

By Michael J. Lewis

The boy was shy, and had difficulty speaking, when the Arlington (N.Y.) High School girls lacrosse team met him in the spring of 2013.

His name was Angelo Mastandrea, and the 3-year-old had already endured more time in hospitals and surgical rooms than most people see in a lifetime.

Diagnosed at 14 months old with hydrocephalus, as well as a pilocytic astrocytoma, Angelo endured two brain surgeries, and then a shunt put into his head as well.

His parents, Frank and Melissa, heard about Friends of Jaclyn through Melissa's hairdresser, who knew Denis and Lynda Murphy.

Pretty soon, an idea was hatched: The Arlington lacrosse team would adopt local boy Angela. A lacrosse team that happened to have Taryn Murphy, sister of FOJ founder Jaclyn, playing on it.

"We were unsure what to expect at first, because we didn't know how these teenage girls would react to Angelo," Frank Mastandrea said. "And then after we met them, we were just embarrassed, because you don't expect people you don't know to be so warm and giving. They just overwhelmed us."

The Mastandreas shock and joy is common to new FOJ families, who often can't believe all these college (or in this case, high school) athletes would be so giving of their time.

But in this case, especially, the Mastandreas needn't have worried about how Angelo would be treated.

If there's one athlete who knows exactly what it's like to live and hang out with someone suffering from a brain tumor, it is Taryn Murphy.

"It's been an amazing, rewarding experience," says Taryn, who has since graduated Arlington and now attends the University at Albany in upstate New York. "To see firsthand the impact the Northwestern team had on Jaclyn all those years ago, it's so great to be able to a part of a team that can do that for someone else."

Over the past two years the love affair between Angelo (now 5) and the Arlington team has grown stronger. Shortly after the adoption, Angelo began becoming more expressive when he was around the squad; Taryn remembered a hilarious day when they all danced to the big hit song "Gangnam Style," with Angelo bopping and bouncing his way through the tune.

There have been pregame "pasta parties" the night before the game; a wealth of support coming from Arlington head coach Dan Schmitt and wife Megan, and a special bond between assistant coach Mike Lowell and Angelo.

"Angelo just loves him," Frank says. "He's like a brother to me, that's how great he's been with Angelo."

Melissa noticed big changes with her son as well after the team adopted him and Angelo's brother Domenic (now 8).

Angelo, she says, loved the attention and started to say the word "ball" at times. He "ate up the love they gave him, and it made him so happy to feel important to them," Melissa said.

And Domenic has been a big part of the Arlington squad as well, as team members attended his birthday parties and made posters for him, in addition to watching a few of his soccer games.

"Our team, we all just wanted to make Angelo's day better, and make every moment they had with him be the best experience he could ever have."

Even though most of the original Arlington players who met Angelo have graduated, the responsibility has gotten passed down to younger players. And as Angelo continues to battle behavioral and other issues, Arlington's girls are there for him every step of the way.

For Melissa, having Taryn be so involved after going through the experiences with Jaclyn has been a big help, and she continues to be amazed at the love and kindness her family has been shown.

"People say there are always some good things that come out of bad things, and one of the only good things I can think of (coming) out of Angelo's situation is FOJ," Melissa said. "We've met such great people, people who care so much about Angelo. It's been a wonderful, wonderful relationship."