NEWS FROM SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW YORK

Triumph

November 2004

Special Olympics New York

Cloudy Day, Bright Spirits

Athletes Shine on a Fall day in Central New York

In the crisp autumn air of the Genesee Region more than 1,000 athletes and coaches from across the Empire State enjoyed the 2004 Fall Games. For the second consecutive year, athletes took part in eight events at the New York Chiropractic College (NYCC) and local venues in Seneca Falls, October 8 -10.

Athletes kicked off the weekend with Friday night's opening ceremony, hosted by New York Lottery's Yolanda Vega and Olympic Gold Medalist Jeff Blatnick. Saturday morning it was off to the fields, streets and links, for competition in bocce, cross-country running, cycling, equestrian, golf, roller skating, soccer and softball. In addition to the more than 1,000 athletes and coaches, hundreds of volunteers, fans, sponsors and visitors were in Seneca Falls for the annual Fall Games celebration.

This was the second and final year for the Fall Games at the New York Chiropractic College but hopefully not the last. NYCC President Frank Nicchi thanked SONY for calling his college home for the last two years and said that SONY and its athletes are welcomed to come back anytime. "For the second straight year we were impressed with the college, its support and facilities and its

Continued P.5

Health of Athletes in Focus at Fall Games

In addition to the competition on the fields at Fall Games, hundreds of athletes also received some much needed health screenings. Thanks to the volunteers and clinicians of Healthy Athletes, hundreds of athletes streamed into Olympic Village for the free check-ups. From head to toes, clinicians screened the athletes and gave them pointers on how to stay healthy. The athletes made their way through all the tents and met with clinicians representing Fit Feet, Healthy Hearing, Special Smiles, Opening Eyes, Sun Safety and Tobacco Free Sports.

Many of the clinicians at the Fall Games have been working with Healthy Athletes for a few years, but there were also some new faces in Seneca Falls. Kim Tillery, a Professor at SUNY Fredonia brought a dozen students with her this year.

The students were among 30 clinicians who took part in a day of training on Friday October 8, and then used that training on Saturday with the athletes. This was the

Continued P.3

Help Make the Holidays Merry for Special Olympics Athletes

The season for giving is just around the corner. As you celebrate the holidays with family and friends, we hope that you'll also consider a gift to Special Olympics New York (SONY).

By making a donation, you can help ensure that the 40,000 athletes served by SONY will have sports training and competition in 2005 and beyond. Your contributions will help our athletes continue to experience the thrill of competition, the courage in trying and the joy of achievement. Simply put, you can Inspire Greatness in our athletes.

"Each year, Special Olympics New York conducts more than 400 competitions across the state for individuals with intellectual disabilities," said Neal J. Johnson president and CEO of SONY. "We do not charge our athletes or their families anything to participate so individual and corporate generosity is critical."

In addition to supporting competitions in New York, contributions can also fund more far-reaching initiatives. For example, New York athletes will be heading to Nagano, Japan for the 2005 World Winter Games.

Opportunities like these wouldn't exist without our sponsors," Johnson said. "A simple donation can truly change lives."

To give a holiday gift, please call 800-836-6976, or write to: Special Olympics New York, Holiday Fund, 504 Balltown Road, Building 12-C, Schenectady, New York, 12304.

What's INSIDE

3

6-7 *Torch Run Times*

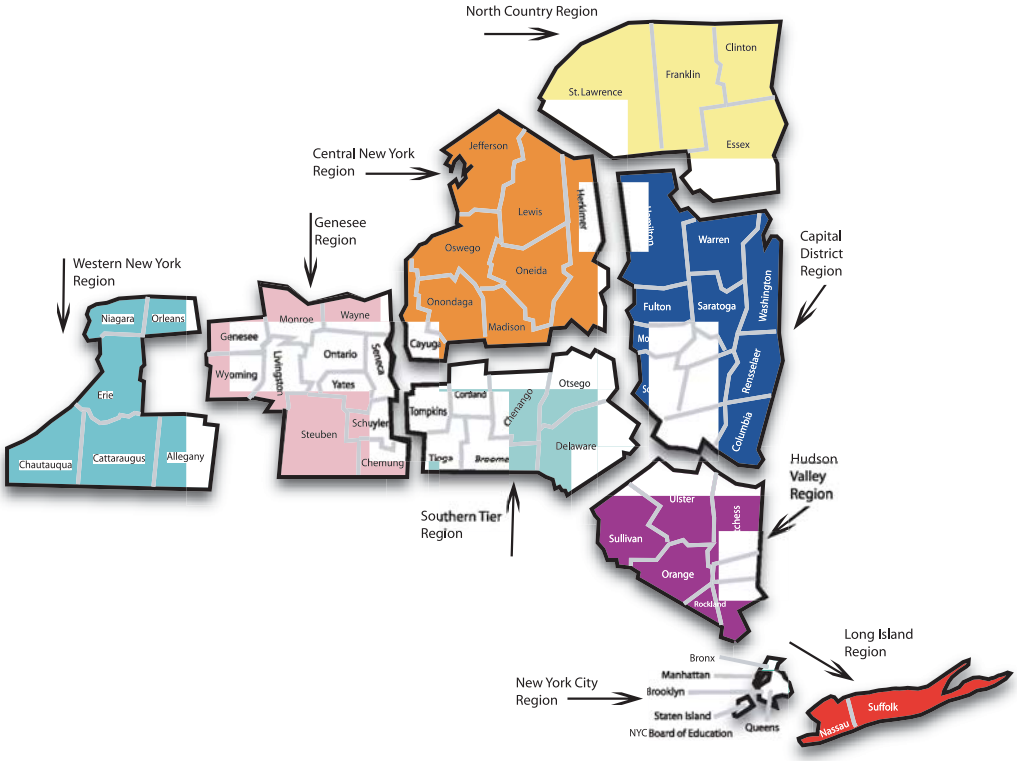
A Message from the **President**

Neal J. Johnson is President & CEO of Special Olympics New York, Inc.

Most readers of this newsletter are aware that Special Olympics New York is going through an organizational change. From the beginning of our "regionalization" effort our goal has been very simple: to provide SONY athletes, volunteers, and families with a consistent, high quality sports training and competition program, regardless of where they live. At the same time, we are striving to increase the number of athletes served and the amount of competitive opportunities offered.

After being in full operation for several months, the Genesee and Long Island Regions have proven our belief that this type of structure will enable us to use our resources more efficiently and meet our goals quicker. Within the new regional structures, the commitment to meet the needs of our athletes will always remain paramount. Further, as the regions pursue their goals of increasing the number of athletes and activities, the roles played by volunteers have become even more important.

The world is a very different place than it was just a few years ago. SONY must react and respond to those changes if we are to remain one of the most respected and effective service organizations in the state. In the next few months we will begin to establish our next two regions: Central New York and Hudson Valley. We look forward to working with all our longtime volunteers to help us in this effort and invite all in the community to help us inspire greatness.



Triumph

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Inspire Greatness

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Focusing on Healthy Athletes

Continued from P.1

third year Kim has brought students to the games,. "Our students really enjoy going to the games, not only do they have a great time, they're also learning," said Tillery. "The students learn how to provide hearing screenings to the athletes and how to trouble shoot medical issues as they arise. More importantly, they are able to use their training in such an important way: to screen with compassion. These are qualities that all professionals should maintain and what a better way to develop them than with Special Olympics," said Tillery.

Pam Hoffman is one of the Healthy Athletes volunteers for Fit Feet. The podiatrist admits to tempting athletes into the tent with free Thor-lo socks, which the company graciously donated. Once inside, the Fit Feet flock screened more than 100 athletes. "It was especially gratifying when one athlete visited us with very wet feet and his socks were destroyed. I was able to outfit him comfortably with a new pair of moisture absorbing Thor-lo socks. Doctor Davidson and I received more hugs in one day than ever before. The athletes make all the effort worthwhile." said Pam.

Pam, who helped develop Fit Feet, got started thanks to Beverly Berkin. Beverly has been with Special Olympics for four years and was one of the founders of Sun Safety. "Like most volunteers, my experience with the athletes changed my life," said Beverly.

"When I first met the athletes, coaches and the families, I was hooked!" Over the years Beverly has helped Sun Safety grow to amazing heights. "Most recently I was able to assist is securing a $10,000 grant from the Sun Safety Alliance and the Rite Aid Corporation. The grant will be used to further develop our sun safety and skin cancer prevention messages," said Beverly.

"These clinicians are such an incredible resource to maintain the health of our athletes," says Diana Bennett, Director of Volunteer Management. "They are also learning about a portion of the population that many clinicians have had little to no contact with. When they go back to their professions they are instrumental in helping their co-workers better understand our athletes and their needs."

Point of View

By Diana Bennett

While the benefits of the Healthy Athletes program may seem self-evident, the impact of it isn't always appreciated. If an athlete can't hear their coach, they can't follow instructions. A person with poor vision can't clearly see the ball coming towards them. Anyone with a dental problem is avoiding eating foods that may be good for them. Wearing the wrong type of foot wear will slow an athlete down. Sunscreen and proper hydration are vital to peak performance.

In addition to diagnosing problems, one of the objectives of the Healthy Athletes program is to train health care professionals and students about the needs and care of people with intellectual disabilities. Over the past three years of working with the Healthy Athletes program, I have come to see the tremendous impact of the involvement of health care students.

Eleven teaching universities in New York State are currently involved with the Special Olympics Healthy Athlete initiative. Many of the students from these colleges have been trained to serve as Healthy Athlete clinicians, even more have volunteered at a screening event. Having had an experience working with the athlete population, these future health care professionals will be able to better serve patients who are intellectually and developmentally disabled.

Over the years, several students stand out in my mind. Jorge Zavala, now a graduate of Hunter College and an audiologist, organized Healthy Hearing at the 2004 Metro Tournament. Kendra Fryer, a dental student at the University of Buffalo, has recruited upwards of 40 volunteers for Special Smiles screenings around the state this year alone. Huy Tran and Jason Ding from the SUNY College of Optometry applied for and received a grant to provide follow up activites with Special Olympics athletes who have been through the Opening Eyes screenings. This is just a small sample of the commitment I have observed from the students involved with the Healthy Athletes program.

The success of Special Olympics Healthy Athletes events depends on partnering. Having the health care students as a member of the team is great for the present but even better for the future health of our athletes. When these students become professionals, they will be more comfortable and better prepared to accept patients that have intellectual disabilities.

Point of View is written periodically. Diana Bennett is the Director of Volunteer Management for SONY. To submit a Point of View idea, contact Eric Wohlleber at 518-388-0793 or ewohlleber@nyso.org.

Tee it Up Benefit Grows in 2nd Year

Golfers enjoy perfect Fall day while supporting SONY

Under sunny skies and mild temperatures golfers hit the links in Mechanicville for a day of fun and fund raising. Pacific Industries' Second Annual Benefit for Special Olympics New York teed off Friday, September 24, at The Fairways of Halfmoon. "This was a great day and a great turn out," said Bill Wiley, Director of Marketing for Pacific Industries. "We have been able to build on our success from last year and we're extremely happy with the results."

Bill has volunteered for Special Olympics in the past and it was that experience that came into play when Pacific began looking for new ways to reach out to the community. "When we were looking for a cause to get behind Special Olympics fit the bill. It is a reputable charity, the athletes are amazing and we wanted to be a part of it," said Wiley.

Over one hundred and twenty golfers took to the links, 30 more than last year. With the support of our 27 sponsors, the benefit raised more than double compared to its' inaugural year. "The golfers and the sponsors were great," said Special Olympics President and CEO Neal J. Johnson. "Their generosity helped make for a memorable day and will help us provide many great days for our athletes."

Just as the second annual benefit was teeing off Pacific's Bill Wiley was already talking about next year. "We want to see this grow every year," said Wiley. "Our ultimate goal is to have hundreds of golfers at a number of different golf courses. We want to make it so exciting that people are screaming to get in."

TORCH RUN TIMES

Law Enforcement Torch Run News

Get Your Raffle Ticket NOW!!!

There's less than a month left to get your name into the raffle for a brand new motorcycle. For just $20 you can to riding on a Harley Davidson 2005 Dyna Super Glide Custom. The Law Enforcement Torch Run is giving away the bike on December 4, at Moroney's Harley Davidson in New Windsor. There are still tickets left and time for you to get your name in the drawing. You can take your chances with one raffle for $20 or if you're a bargain hunter you can grab three tickets for $50. If you're not much of a rider, don't worry. You can always take the $15,000 in cash instead of the bike. In addition to the Harley there will be another $1,000 in prizes given away as well!!! But you can't win it if you're not in it, so get your ticket today. Tickets can be purchased by dialing 800-836-6976.

The Fire Truck Pull scheduled for October 2, in the Hudson Valley Region had to be rescheduled for October 30. We'll bring you scenes from the competition next month.

In Case you Missed it

Just in case you missed it, Special Olympics New York got some national television exposure this month. The 2004 Law Enforcement Torch Run Plane Pull was featured in the October 11th episode of "American Choppers." Special Olympic athletes Kurt Dias, Kevin Brown and Katie Cranston-Spadafora were featured with Paul Sr., Paul Jr., Mikey and the whole crew from the show. While the Orange County Chopper team came in fourth place they had a lot of fun and so did the athletes.

Paul Jr., Special Olympic Athlete Kevin Brown, and Paul Sr. at the 2004 Plane Pull at the Albany International Airport.

Up Against the Column

Mike Murray

LETR State Committee

Auburn Correctional Facility

I have been a coach on the street and in my school district for almost 25 years. I work at the Auburn correctional facility and I'm the Public Relations man for our union. Before our Superintendent got a committee together for Special Olympics I had never heard much about the organization in the Auburn area. When I started participating in fundraisers I was a little surprised at how well it took off. When I went to my first LETR State Committee meeting I met many people that commit a lot of time and energy. I thought that I wouldn't be able to commit as much, with everything else I'm into plus my family. Boy was I wrong!!!

I took my family to our first Winter Games and got to hand out the trophies for skiing and skating. WOW!!! All it did was rain and I thought it ruined the whole day for the athletes. But what I saw was a special kind of person that day, and so did my children. There was no crying about the weather, there were no bad words spoken to each other and no trash talking … we witnessed true athletes. We saw shots being giving on the hockey floor that would make the NHL proud. But then they helped each other up and hugged and apologized. We were in awe and we were hooked. We go to every Winter and Fall Games now. This year I even made the Summer Games at Hofstra. There I got the privilege to judge the weight lifting and dead lifting. I once coached a team in Auburn that I took to a tournament and broke 32 state and 6 national records in one day. But the feeling at this meet was like no other, it blew my mind. The

Continued P. 7

Up Against the Column

Continued from P.6

enthusiasm in these athletes was far more than any teams I have ever coached in my life. I felt myself cheering more than judging. Above all, the thing that hits me the most is the privilege and honor I have had to help run the torch into the opening ceremonies. The smiles on the faces of the 2 athletes running with us, and the rush you get from the athletes screaming and cheering at you, it's a feeling that everyone should get the chance to experience.

When I meet new people and they ask me what I do for a living, I catch myself saying I work with the Special Olympics Torch Run. When they say that most be a great job I have to explain to them that I actually work for the Department of Corrections but I volunteer for Special Olympics. It's too bad my paying job really interferes with my volunteer work.

As always, my family and I thank Special Olympics for the honor and privilege to work with you and the athletes.

Polar Plunge 2005

As we start to leave the warm weather and PLUNGE into winter, what better way to enter the new season than with a Polar Plunge? The first Polar Plunge will be taking place February 6th 2005 at Ontario Beach Park, Charlotte, Rochester, NY. For registration information plungers are diving towards www.polarplunge.net. The Plunge is being dubbed "The Dive in 05" with a goal of 500 plungers. Not to be outdone, the second Polar Plunge is scheduled for March 12 at camp Mariah, Sharpe Reservation, Fishkill, NY. To get more information on either plunge call 800-836-6976. Its never too cold for a Polar Plunge and its never too early to start raising money for the athletes of Special Olympics New York.

LETR International Conference

November 18-22, 2004

Hundreds of Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) officials will be flocking to Virginia in mid-November for the annual International Conference. All 50 states and 35 countries will be represented, including a dozen people from the Empire State. Special Olympics New York (SONY) Law Enforcement Torch Run members will include Sal Gerbino, Mike Benson, Kevin Arnone, Jeff Galm, Mike Murray, Mark Mau and Dom Giudice.

The Law Enforcement Officers from New York will be looking to create networking opportunities with other programs. The agenda at the conference lends itself to networking, strategizing, and overall expansion of programs. "The ultimate goal is for those attending to walk away with a new outlook on how we can better serve our nearly 40,000 athletes," said Chris Porreca Director of Development.

The SONY contingent will be keeping a close eye not only on the meetings, but also on how to host the annual international conference, that will be coming to Buffalo in two years. They'll be asking a lot of questions on how to pull off such a big event, how to plan a conference, and what Special Olympics Virginia did to get venues and donations. LETR will also use the conference as a way to come up with an outline for the 2006 meeting in Buffalo and set their goals.

"We are in the beginning of the planning stage for the 2006 meeting right now," said Porreca. "We've already held a few planning sessions and we'll be using this conference as a stepping stone to 2006." The LETR staff will start to look at speakers, sites for hosting events and working with the Chamber of Commerce in Buffalo to produce a video to entice people to come to Buffalo in 2006.

"It is an honor to be hosting the 2006 conference," said Neal J. Johnson, President and CEO for Special Olympics New York. "We will be in Virginia this year not only to make the LETR in this state stronger, but also to get a better understanding of how to organize such a major event. In two years we plan on hosting the best conference ever."

Calling All Law Enforcement

A dollar and a badge number.

The New York LETR program already enjoys a dedicated base of Law Enforcement members who work hard and give up their personal time to help our athletes. As we thank them for all that they do, we're asking them to do something else, something pretty easy. There are more than 275,000 Law Enforcement members in this state and we're asking each of them to donate a dollar and their badge number. This is how it works:

Take a dollar and add the last two numbers on your badge.

$1 + your badge number, let's say its 2687, that would make your donation $1.87.

All you have to do is ask your co-workers:

"Did you donate $1 and your badge number?"

Please send your donations to: Law Enforcement Torch Run, Special Olympics New York, 504 Balltown Road, Schenectady 12304.

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Don't forget to send your letters to the editor. Submit letters to Eric Wohlleber, Special Olympics New York, 504 Balltown Road, Schenectady, NY 12304, or e-mail them to ewohlleber@nyso.org.

For every Entertainment Book purchased between November 1 and February 27, Price Chopper Supermarkets will donate $5 to Special Olympics New York. Help our athletes, suport our programs and get great entertainment values!

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Marist College, one of the host sites for the Miles for Medals walks in 2004.

Next Month:

- Fall Conference Highlights
- Miles for Medals
- Scenes from the Firetruck Pull

SONY's mission is to provide sports training and athletic competition to individuals with intellectual disabilities, including mental retardation. Our programs are designed to offer participants continuing opportunities to enjoy sports, develop physical fitness and demonstrate courage while interacting with their families, the community and other Special Olympics athletes.