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Special Olympics Hawaii 2019 Highlights

This year is surely one to remember as our programs and athletes reached new heights. These were just a few of this year's highlights...
In 2019 Special Olympics Hawaii served more than 4,500 athletes and Unified partners on every island in our state with the help of more than 11,500 coaches and volunteers.

Hawaii’s own Khiry “Rainie Jade” Thompson and Tyler Morimoto competed in the 2019 World Games in Abu Dhabi, where they represented our state and the United States winning three gold medals, one silver medal and one bronze medal in track and field.

We welcomed three new staff members to our team. Jodi-Anne Yoshida joined us as Oahu regional director, Diana Lo as administrative assistant and recently Kalei Castillo as Unified schools coordinator.

Waialua Elementary School received a National Banner Recognition for the 2019-2020 school year. They were the first elementary school in the state to receive this distinction and received this honor as a result of meeting national standards for excellence in the areas of inclusion, advocacy and respect.

Special Olympics Hawaii received Servco Foundation’s 2019 community grant. Special Olympics Hawaii was one of 19 nonprofits selected to receive this $20,000 grant, thanks to the many nominations from our supportive community.

Special Olympics Hawaii athlete Renee Manfredi sang the National Anthem at the Boston’s Red Sox game in March. She also had the honor of singing alongside celebrated singer and actress Vanessa Williams at Hyannis Point in July.

Happy Holidays from Special Olympics Hawaii!

The entire Special Olympics Hawaii team would like to send warm wishes to you and your ohana this holiday season. We’d also like to extend a big mahalo to all of our staff, volunteers, and athletes for making 2019 such an amazing year -- we can’t wait to see you in 2020!

Holiday Classic 2019

Congratulations to our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes who competed in the Waikiki Biathlon! Reyse Sakima and Alice Webb, both Special Olympics athletes from our Ducks delegation, competed in the Waikiki Swim Club’s Christmas biathlon on December 7, 2019. Reyse competed in a 5k run (a little over three miles) and finished in 32:29 minutes, and Alice competed in a 1k swim (1,000 meters) and finished in 29:16 minutes. They both placed third in their division (a cumulative age of 55-74) and were honored at the awards ceremony.

Duck athlete, Tyler Morimoto also competed in a Unified event with a young lady from Kamehameha Schools. Tyler completed the 5k run at 20:30 minutes and his Unified partner completed the 1k swim in 28:12 minutes. They placed first in the 35-54 age division for a mixed team (male/female).
End of Year Giving!

Orangetheory Fitness and the 3-2-1 Challenge!

At Holiday Classic, fitness Instructor's Ryan and Ryan (yes the two Ryans!) challenged Special Olympics Hawaii athletes to get fit. The new 3-2-1 routine addressed strength, flexibility and balance in five simple exercises. Motivated athletes signed up to text photos of them exercising at least three times a week for eight weeks. Those that complete the eight-week program have a chance to win prizes donated by Orangetheory Fitness. Mahalo Orangetheory Fitness for your continued support of the health of our athletes. Good luck athletes!

United Airlines Fantasy Flight Takes Special Olympics Hawaii to an Island Winter Wonderland!

Special Olympics Hawaii athletes were fortunate to be invited to United Airlines’ Fantasy Flight for the second year in a row! More than 80 athletes and Unified partners and 43 chaperones attended this year's event which departed from Daniel K. Inouye International Airport and arrived at the North Pole.

Unfortunately, “with bad weather in the forecast” Santa told his team to meet him at Christmas Island instead of the North Pole. Once there, each athlete and Unified partner received a gift from Santa, enjoyed a delicious meal and participated in games and activities set up throughout the airplane hanger. At the end of the day, they were transported through a magical tunnel that carried them back to Honolulu. Mahalo United Airlines!

Unified Spotlight: An Inclusion Moment

United Airlines Fantasy Flight Takes Special Olympics Hawaii to an Island Winter Wonderland!
Support Maui Athletes at Battle of the Badge on January 18!


Having a Jingle Ball with Inspire Church

Our athletes put on their festive dancing shoes and rocked the night away thanks to Inspire Church!

Holoholo Club

Windward Mall - Every Tues. Afternoon
4:00 - 4:30 pm in front of Big City Diner

Ala Moana Center - Every Wed. Afternoon
4:00 - 4:30 pm in front of Target on Mall Level 2

Top Walkers This Month:

Parent - Randall Yakota, 275 miles
Athlete - Marcelino Galdones, 215 miles
Athlete - Kamae Abella, 152 miles

Overall Top Walker:

Parent - Randall Yokoto: 2,801.34 miles

By Jessica Adkins (written following the first-ever Maui Island High School Unified basketball league game)

Last night when I got home, I searched for the words to accurately describe my feelings. After a little Googling, I came across an article for the five ways extremely successful people find fulfillment written by Matthew Jones.

When reading this article several things stood out to me. The main statement that I focused on was that when you challenge yourself to grow, contribute to others, and live in the present moment, you will improve your productivity and feel a sense of fulfillment.

For the past four and a half years, I have connected myself to something larger. I have allowed myself to grow as an educator constantly striving to be better and to provide the best for each and every one of my students.

Last night after years of developing the Unified Sports program at Maui High, I was finally able to see our kids have a friendly basketball competition with Baldwin High School our cross-town rivals in the first-ever Maui Unified Sports League Play. It is crazy to me when I compare my program from 2017 to today and think about how much it has grown. My students’ visions have become realities.

Last night for a few moments, I was able to hit the pause button and just be present. I watched Maui High Schools Unified Cheerleaders shine, Maui High’s Unified Basketball team inclusively compete and Baldwin High School begin to navigate this amazing emotional concept of social inclusion. During this short pause, I was able to see something that I, as an educator, have looked over far too many times. I was able to see the parents, families, and community members unite, cheer for their favorite player and have hope. I hope that this was only the beginning of a new era of social inclusion. When I hit that freeze button to reflect on the changes and growth, I felt a sense of meaning and purpose.

The article says that one reaches fulfillment by engaging in the never-ending process of self-improvement and that fulfillment comes from witnessing your own growth. Last night when I hit the freeze button it was one of those times that I felt fulfilled.

People always ask me “why did you become a teacher?” and I honestly think they should be asking why did I stay as a teacher... my answer is moments like these. I want to thank the administration and athletic directors from both Maui High School and Baldwin High School for making a vision become a reality. Also thanks to Ted Lusk from Baldwin for his enthusiasm for inclusion. Finally, thank you to the parents and community members for supporting the kids.
Aloha Mollie, Welcome Kalei!

Special Olympics Hawaii sends a heartfelt aloha to Mollie Bruhl, our original Unified Schools manager and sports assistant. Mollie's hard work and dedication greatly advanced the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools program here in Hawaii, helping to increase participating schools from 46 to 72 under her direction.

She was also instrumental in developing three high school basketball league programs statewide. Her boundless energy and generous spirit provided support to many other inclusionary activities and events. She will be greatly missed by Special Olympics staff, teachers, coaches, parents and athletes.

Starting in January, we are excited to welcome new Unified Schools coordinator, Kalei Castillo. Kalei is a great advocate for inclusion and she brings experience working in schools from her work with the Best Buddies program.