In its eleventh year the annual Polar Plunge returns for another cool and thrilling day of fun, all to raise awareness and funds for Special Olympics Hawaii. The action is set for Saturday, April 18, 2020, and challenges participants to plunge down a 95-foot long, 36-foot high inflatable slide into a pool of ice-cold water, on the lawn of Waterfront Plaza fronting Ala Moana Blvd. The event begins at 9 a.m. with plunging every hour until noon.

"Although the plunge is ice cold, it warms our hearts knowing that we have such a strong community that supports this event year after year," said Tracey Bender, Special Olympics Hawaii director of development. "We're grateful for all of our participants that go above and beyond to help bring sports and wellness programs into the lives of children and adults with intellectual disabilities."

Registration is now open online!
Thank You HANO for Featuring Special Olympics Hawaii
Mahalo to Jim George and the Hawaii Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations for continuing to showcase the work of Special Olympics Hawaii as well as all nonprofits in our great state! Read the full story here.

The Power to Have a Voice
Special Olympics athlete Renee, was featured in a compelling video for Bank of America. Renee met with their Support Services team and spoke with them about how Special Olympics helps those with intellectual disabilities. Watch her inspiring video.

Our Young Athletes Program Benefits All
Earlier this month, some of our littlest athletes participated in a Young Athletes event at Kaiser High School. Special Gold!
To kick-off the new year, Special Olympics Hawaii would like to feature one of our longtime athletes, Vivian. A resident of Hilo and participant in Special Olympics East Hawaii, Vivian is 89 years old and has been competing in Special Olympics for more than 40 years!

Vivian primarily competes in bocce and most recently participated in our fall state games, the Holiday Classic. Vivian constantly amazes others with her strength and independence -- for example, she still lives on her own!

"Vivian sets a good example for others and always has a positive attitude. I truly believe she is the epitome of what Special Olympics is all about," said Coach Gwynn Sosa, founding volunteer for Special Olympics Hawaii since 1968.

Thank you Vivian, for continuing to be an inspiration for others!

2020 Welcomes Several New Members to our Special Olympics Ohana
From left to right: Paige Hollenbeck, Renee Manfredi, Kalei Castillo
It's a new year, and we're excited to welcome several new members to our Special Olympics Hawaii ohana.
Olympics Young Athletes is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities. Children of all abilities take part; and they all benefit. Learn more at sohawaii.org.

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:
Partner - Ma Shoyen White, 253 miles
Athlete - Renee Manfredi, 169 miles
Parent - Randall Yokota, 133 miles

Overall Top Walker:
Parent - Randall Yokota, 7,312 miles

Amazon Smile
Be sure to shop with Amazon Smile and select Special Olympics Hawaii. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to programs for our local athletes!

Paige Hollenbeck is the newest member of our Development Team. She will serve as Development Coordinator for the Law Enforcement Torch Run and related LETR fundraising events. Paige will also work closely with the team on other fundraising events and initiatives throughout the year. Paige's previous work experiences have been in the event and marketing fields in both the private sector and with the military. She has a personal connection to our mission of serving people with intellectual disabilities and has firsthand knowledge of how sports and recreation can make a tremendous difference in the lives of athletes and their families.

Renee Manfredi just joined our Special Olympics Hawaii team as an intern this month. Renee is a Special Olympics athlete on the Board of Directors for Special Olympics Hawaii and also serves as a Special Olympics North America Health Messenger. Most recently she was selected as a Sargent Shriver International Global Messenger. Renee will be helping in our organization in the areas of health and athlete leadership.

Kaleikaulani Skye Castillo joins us as our new Unified Champions Schools Coordinator. Kalei comes to us from the Hawaii Best Buddies International program, where she helped to develop new strategies to build strong chapter programs within the schools. At that time, she was also in charge of the Special Olympics Oahu Best Buddies Unified Basketball league. She has worked closely with individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities since 2010.

A warm welcome to our newest team members, and we look forward to seeing how they will impact our organization and programs.

Unified Spotlight: Punahou School School Students Recognize SOHI Athletes as Heroes

Punahou School students returned from winter break 2019 to take part in G-Term, a special interim where students engage in a non-graded class before the second semester begins. Students select courses from more than 70 options, including campus sessions, four-day experiences on Oahu, and extended international and domestic trips. The immersive courses cover a wide variety of topics, including Hawaiian culture, the arts, community service, social responsibility, cultural awareness, history, technology, and life skills.
"G-Term allows students to gain meaningful experiences that extend beyond the classroom walls and are not possible during the regular school schedule," says Trisha Caley, Director of Academy special terms.

One of the many courses offered for G-Term 2019 was Super Heroes, which allowed students to brainstorm and think out of the box, on what a hero would typically look like. Mr. Chai Reddy of Punahou School, reached out to Special Olympics Hawaii to collaborate with his 18 students. The Punahou School students wanted to explore and learn about inclusion and acceptance of other students who have an intellectual disability. The students felt that they were among the unsung heroes in the community!

Punahou School gave a warm welcome to our athletes from Kaimuki and Kailua High School. They presented the students, teachers, and our Special Olympics Hawaii staff with handmade yarn lei. After icebreakers and introductions, each Punahou School student paired up with a Special Olympics athlete and the fun began! The Punahou School students showed Just Dance videos and got everyone up and dancing throughout the room! It was awesome to see everyone enjoying the music and moving around.

After a few videos, the students took a break and broke out into activity stations. The stations included drawing, lei making, Uno, Jenga, and other board games. The true value of this G-Term was shown at lunch. The Punahou and Special Olympics Hawaii athletes interacted and had true meaningful conversations as they ate their pizza and shared their snacks. There was a sharing of art and casual banter like any room full of teenagers. The weather did not permit the group to play bocce outside, so instead, they held a Connect 4 tournament.

It was heartwarming to see the teams work together and strategize their game plans. Many of the Punahou School students allowed Special Olympics athletes to take the lead. Kaimuki High School teacher Keevan Matsumoto said, “The day was amazing for his students. They were able to experience a new campus and new friends! It was such a heartwarming event to see all the students working together and having fun.”

At the end of the day, the Punahou School students reflected on their time and experience with the fun-filled day of activities. One student expressed that he was astounded at how easy it was for him to interact with his athlete. In the beginning, he was fearful of the challenge it could present but quickly realized the athletes were similar to him. As a class, they quickly realized there are more similarities amongst them, than there are differences. Another student from Punahou shared that he was excited about opportunities to stay connected and engaged. The future is bright as these current high school students work to build a community with inclusion and respect for all of us.
Since 2003 BrandSafway has served as a wonderful year-round supporter of Special Olympics Hawaii. BrandSafway provides a wide range of services in commercial and infrastructure markets worldwide and is a very important partner during our Cop on Top and Over the Edge fundraisers.

The partnership began with six scaffolds for our Cop on Top fundraiser and has grown to include 13 scaffolds from Hawaii Kai to Ewa Beach. They also build the scaffolding needed on the roof and landing zone for our Over the Edge fundraiser at the Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and Spa. BrandSafway donates their equipment to erect scaffolding valued at over $39,000 a year! Their employees also supported Special Olympics Hawaii by participating in the Over the Edge event.

Read the full story here.