

Special Olympics Hawaii



Special Olympics Hawaii 2021 Awards



School of the Year:
Kaimuki High School

Delegation of the Year:
Honokaa Hawks

Coach of the Year:
Danny Vasconcellos

Volunteer of the Year:
Grace Leong

Family of the Year:
Burke Ohana



Male Athlete of the Year:
Kyson Cadium

Female Athlete of the Year:
Britney Bautista

Unified Partner of the Year:
Marissa Matsushige

Athlete in Media:
Jack Whitaker

Organization of the Year:
Kaiser Permanente

Above and Beyond Awards



Dr. Benjamin Chun

Aaron Swan

Denise Lindsey

Erika Huddle

Each year we recognize individuals or groups who have made significant contributions to our program. Many factors are taken into consideration in the selection process including their impact and commitment.

Congratulations to all of the 2021 Special Olympics Hawaii Award winners. We are so thankful for all that you do and your tremendous impact on our organization, mission and the lives of our athletes and families.

School of the Year: Kaimuki High School

Despite challenges brought upon by the pandemic, Kaimuki High School has shown their commitment by participating in various events including the Movband League Play Challenge, Virtual Spring Fitness Classic, Return to Play Oahu Bocce Festival, the Comeback Games, and the Virtual Holiday Fitness Classic. Keevan Matsumoto leads the Kaimuki High School delegation and is a positive role model for his students, athletes, and other Head of Delegations within Special Olympics Hawaii.

Delegation of the Year: Honokaa Hawks

The Honokaa Hawks have participated in every virtual fitness competition that Special

Olympics Hawaii hosted in 2021. The team has seen a significant improvement in their athletes' physical fitness, and they are exemplary examples for all delegations. A special mahalo to two amazing individuals, Duane and Sheila DeLuz, who handle all the paperwork and most of the coaching for the Honokaa Hawks!

Coach of the Year: Danny Vasconcellos

Danny Vasconcellos is an influential coach for track and field, basketball, softball and soccer, and dedicates most of his time to the parents, volunteers and coaches of the Terminators delegation. Danny always prioritizes safety and improving the skills of his athletes by adjusting his coaching styles to meet each of his athletes' skill levels. He was selected as the Hui O Hawaii soccer coach for the 2018 USA Summer Games in Seattle, Washington, and did an outstanding job bringing home the gold!

Please also join us in congratulating: Dean Trotsuk – Maui Coach of the Year, Crystal Mcleod – Molokai Coach of the Year, Melissa Iida – Kauai Coach of the Year, Matthew Schreiber – West Hawaii Coach of the Year

Volunteer of the Year: Grace Leong

Since 2011, Grace Leong has demonstrated her commitment to Special Olympics Hawaii by serving as co-head of delegation and leading parent and athlete outreach for many years. Grace is a dedicated parent to one of our Windward Warrior athletes and is an assistant coach in bowling. She participates in every practice for every sport, and volunteers regularly. Throughout the pandemic, Grace also served as the head of our Safety Committee for all COVID-related issues, ensuring the safety of all our athletes.

Please also join us in congratulating: Mei Ortiz – Leeward Volunteer of the Year, Aaron Swan – Maui Volunteer of the Year, Tanya Nakama – East Hawaii Volunteer of the Year

Family of the Year: Burke Ohana

The Burke Ohana's involvement with Special Olympics Hawaii and the Terminators is nothing short of amazing. For over 30 years, the entire family—Dale, Barbara, Brian, Adam, and his wife, Adrianna—have been active team participants. Dale leads athletes with empathy and encouragement; coaching swimming for decades, representing Hawaii in swimming at a World Games, and participating in weekly Zoom meetings for our athletes and their families during the pandemic. Barbara, who leads our delegation with her financial knowledge and skills, and exudes humility as she handles fundraisers, emailing, scheduling events, time assignments and more. Brian, our Special Olympics Hawaii athlete, overcame significant hurdles in his life when he suffered a stroke several years ago that left him partially paralyzed on one side but has made a remarkable recovery from being on a wheelchair to walking several miles, swimming, and playing bocce and softball. Adam and Adrianna went above and beyond as Unified partners helping our Terminator athletes compete, volunteering as virtual coaches, team mentors and Zoom leaders, as well as organizing Zoom team meetings during the pandemic.

Please also join us in congratulating: Hvidding Ohana – Leeward Family of the Year

Male Athlete of the Year: Kyson Cadium

Kyson Cadium, from the Terminators delegation, is an excellent athlete and leader in basketball, soccer, softball, and bowling. His coaches admire how he always listens and strives to improve. Kyson is such an inspiration to the team through his great sportsmanship, kind smile and willingness to step up and help out other athletes. During the first-ever virtual fitness competition, Kyson received three gold medals. Kyson is also a Special Olympics Hawaii Health Messenger—where he shares health tips and information with the team—as well as a Global Messenger and a Toastmaster.

Please also join us in congratulating: Matthew Epperson – Molokai Male Athlete of the Year, Zenon Dolotina – Windward Male Athlete of the Year, Cornelius “Corny” Thompson Leeward Male Athlete of the Year

Female Athlete of the Year: Britney Bautista

Britney Bautista, a member of our Maui program, goes above and beyond in all aspects of Special Olympics Hawaii. Britney has participated in every virtual fitness

challenge offered in 2021, and in the past, has participated in basketball, bocce, and track and field. She is a true team player on and off the courts when she leads the Holoholo club at the University of Hawaii Maui campus, holds events to recruit more walkers, and develops flyers to send out to athletes and students. Even further, Britney also started a Unified club on University of Hawaii Maui campus, is the Special Olympics US Youth Ambassador, and is on the Special Olympics College National Work Team.

Please also join us in congratulating: Eliana Ortiz – Leeward Female Athlete of the Year, Kristina Ho – Windward Female Athlete of the Year, Nicole Kelley – Central/Honolulu Female Athlete of the Year

Unified Partner of the Year: Marissa Matsushige

Marissa Matsushige exceeds the expectations as a Unified Partner for our athletes. Her determination, leadership, compassion, and inclusiveness has helped Marissa grow as a Unified Partner since she first began in sixth grade. Now a junior in high school, Marissa is the president of her school's Team Unify Club. Marissa helped write an innovation grant to advocate for her Team Unify classes, taking field trips to introduce the unify program to elementary schools. She led her club to create safe and socially distanced Unity Week activities during "Spread the Word" week. Marissa's involvement also includes the Special Olympic Hawaii's Youth Activation Committee, the Virtual Spring Fitness Classic, and the Virtual Holiday Classic.

Please also join us in congratulating: Landon Kimura – Central/Honolulu Unified Partner of the Year

Athlete in Media: Jack Whitaker

Jack Whitaker, from the Terminators delegation, exemplifies great talent in creating beautifully crafted videos. During the pandemic, Jack shared his videos with the Terminators at their weekly Zoom meetings. His videos were a hit and he was also asked to create videos for Special Olympics Hawaii competitions. Jack dedicates a lot of his time creating these videos that inspires our athletes and he enjoys every moment doing things for others. His creativity brings joy to his teammates and others, and we're always excited to showcase his videos at our events.

Special Olympics Hawaii Organization of the Year: Kaiser Permanente

Kaiser Permanente Hawaii has been a long-time partner of Special Olympics Hawaii, working with us on Medfest events and are always stepping up when we need their help. Last year, when the Oahu Medfest was not able to be hosted at its usual venue due to the pandemic, Kaiser Permanente Hawaii donated dozens of personnel to host the event at our new Sports and Wellness Center. They also hosted a vaccine drive, allowing hundreds within the Special Olympics Hawaii community to receive their COVID-19 vaccines. Kaiser Permanente Hawaii has also been working with us to create designated homes for Medfest events on our neighbor islands, opening up Healthy Athlete services to more athletes.

Above and Beyond Awards

The Above and Beyond Awards honor individuals who have volunteered throughout the year and have made a difference in the lives of our athletes and Special Olympics Hawaii community.

Dr. Benjamin Chun

Dr. Benjamin Chun has been instrumental in the growth and implementation of Special Olympics Hawaii health programs for years. Since the start of the pandemic, Dr. Chun has led the way in establishing the infrastructure to bring these health services to our neighbor islands. Additionally, he has played a vital role during the Special Olympics Hawaii vaccine drive earlier this year and has been readily available to perform any COVID-related duties we've asked of him. Dr. Chun exemplifies what it means to selflessly serve his community.

Aaron Swan

Aaron Swan has volunteered for Special Olympics Hawaii for many years as a coach and was also named Volunteer of the Year for Maui in 2021. He works closely with his athletes and is constantly going out of his way to do what he can to better the lives of

those with intellectual disabilities. During the pandemic, Aaron stepped up as one of our regular fitness instructors for the now rebranded “Hale’ O Mauiola” virtual programs. Through this experience, Aaron has served as a fitness instructor for Special Olympics Hawaii athletes across the state, always making time for classes and ensuring every athlete has a spot.

Denise Lindsey

Denise Lindsey is a phenomenal member of our team, bringing a unique enthusiasm and joy to our Hale’ O Mauiola fitness classes as a new instructor during the pandemic. She always keeps an eye on her participants, modifying her lessons to ensure that everyone is included and given exercises that they can perform. Denise's expertise with our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes and her knowledge of fitness and nutrition has made her invaluable to our program. Not to mention she is the area director for Special Olympics West Hawaii to boot!

Erika Huddle

Erika Huddle came to us through the University of Hawaii at Manoa and the Unified Champion Schools program. After being introduced to our programs, she quickly became a regular fitness instructor for our Hale’ O Mauiola workouts—teaching yoga to our athletes. She always makes herself available to our programs and athletes, and even jumps into the role of emcee for our dance parties when needed. Her enthusiasm and love for our athletes is unmatched.

Special Olympics Hawaii 2021 Service Awards

This year, we would like to recognize our dedicated and hard-working staff that has put in extra hours and extra effort to provide the highest quality programs for our athletes.

Staff with one or more years of service:

- Nikki Antenucci – one year
- Walker Rowsey – one year
- Kalei Castillo – two years
- Richard Chun – three years
- Chrissy Tancayo – four years
- Garrika Venegas – four years

Staff with five or more years of service:

- Denise Lindsey – five years
- Tracey Bender – nine years

Staff with 15 or more years of service:

- Cindy Ujimori – 16 years
- Jennifer Wong – 17 years
- Jocelyn Barriga – 17 years
- Stephanie Zane – 17 years

Staff with 25 or more years of service:

- Nip Ho – 25 years

Nip joined the Special Olympics Hawaii ohana in May of 1996 as the area services manager. She oversees the area staff and all programs offered to athletes and their families. In her current role as senior vice president of programs. Nip has been involved with many national and world competitions and also leads Athlete Leadership, Health Messengers, and Games Management Systems.

- Adrienne Laurion – 25 years

Adrienne joined the organization in June of 1996 as the Maui area director. She was promoted to Maui County director in 2004 to oversee the Maui, Molokai and Lanai programs. Adrienne was then hired as a full-time staff member in 2018 as the neighbor island regional director to oversee all of the Special Olympics neighbor island area programs. In this position, she coordinates all of the programming for Special Olympics Maui and supervises six area directors. This June, Adrienne will be the USA Games Hui O Hawaii Family Coordinator joining team Hui O Hawaii as they travel to Orlando, Florida.

- Dan Epstein – 28 years

Dan joined Special Olympics Hawaii in August of 1993 as a part-time assistant sports coordinator. He was quickly promoted to sports director and stayed in that position until he was promoted to COO in 2018 and president and CEO in 2020. Throughout his tenure, Dan has served many roles at a national and world level including serving on several Special Olympics committees and traveling to the USA and World Games in different capacities.

Congratulations to all!

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