

## Special Olympics Hawaii Newsletter: December 2023

Thank you for your continued support! Take a look to see what Special Olympics Hawaii has been up to this past month.

Support Our Athletes

### Mission Partners



### Year-Round Partners



### Year-Round Supporters



## What's Going On at Special Olympics Hawaii?

### Looking Forward with Gratitude: A Message from Dan



A sincere mahalo to all those who supported Special Olympics Hawaii and our amazing athletes this year. I can't express enough gratitude to all of our athletes and families, staff, volunteers, partners, and donors for your time and dedication.

This year was filled with many special memories from exciting competitions, heartwarming programs, impactful fundraisers, and events. One of my favorite memories was watching a new, 10 year-old athlete successfully complete both a 50 yd. dash and a running long jump for the first time without assistance at practice held at our Sports and Wellness Complex!

Other highlights from 2023 include:

- The public grand opening of the Sports and Wellness Center and the completion of the Health and Fitness Building and play court. This project was years in the making and to see this dream finally become a reality and to be able to celebrate with our community was a milestone I won't soon forget!
- Seeing so many new and returning athletes continuing to come back to train and compete in-person after

being away during COVID.

- Making the journey with my pal, athlete Ian Kahalewai, to Washington DC for Special Olympics' Capitol Hill Day. Meeting with our representatives and senators and sharing the impact of our organization and the importance of funding the work we do is so important.
- Bonding and working with our Hawaii LETR colleagues and making new friends at the LETR International Conference in Chicago, Illinois. It was an inspiring experience to hear from other members of the torch run community and strengthen the bonds with those within our home state.
- Seeing athletes thrive as leaders within the program through Athlete Leadership Councils, as Toastmasters and Health Messengers, and as leaders of our Holoholo Walking Clubs. Many of them now use our new Center as their hub for athlete programs and leadership.

To our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes, we are so proud of each of you for all of the hard work, dedication, and resilience you put in both on and off the field. I see your commitment to training and your teammates and your passion for sport and your team, and it all makes what we do worth it.

I can't wait to see what 2024 will hold, and look forward to connecting with each of you in the new year.

Happy Holidays and Hau'oli Makahiki Hou!  
Dan Epstein,  
President & CEO, Special Olympics Hawaii

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## New Additions are a Game Changer for Athletes Across the Islands



This month Special Olympics Hawaii celebrated the completion of the Special Olympics Hawaii Sports and Wellness Center. The center opened in 2021 during the pandemic as the first of its kind in the state of Hawaii, specifically dedicated to and designed for athletes with intellectual disabilities. Recent additions to the center include the Health and Fitness Building, providing athletes an area for powerlifting and fitness training, a medical exam and screening area for Healthy Athlete programs, and an area for group exercise. Additionally, the Health and Fitness Building will be used to store

sports, competition, and health and fundraising equipment. We are still working on the last element to the Center, an Outdoor Play Court, which will be designed for basketball, volleyball, pickleball and Young Athlete programs.

Special Olympics Hawaii is thankful to our donors and partners statewide who have stepped up to the plate to make the center a reality. The new Health and Fitness Building and Outdoor Play Court dramatically increases opportunities for athletes, coaches, and families, and also reaches new athletes who have previously never participated in Special Olympics Hawaii programs.

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## Unified Spotlight: That's a Wrap on Movband League Play Season

This month Unified Champion Schools across Kauai finished their Movband League Play fall season. From November through December 2023, a four-week competition between Unified Champion Middle and High Schools was held across Kauai. Each participating school had a team that consisted of athletes and partners who were given Movbands that recorded the total distance they moved each week. Teams worked together to compete against other schools to reach the most steps on their Movbands.

Congratulations to Waimea High School, who won this season and celebrated with a delicious Subway lunch – thanks to advisor Carrie Kimmel.



Special Olympics Hawaii athlete Zariah shared, "It was a good competition and it was fun doing it with my friends. I liked that we had a party afterwards because it kept me motivated to walk. I was happy to hang out and eat Subway with my friends."



## Health & Wellness Corner: We're Growing!



Here are some updates from our Healthy Athletes program this month.

Community Collaborative for Intellectual Disabilities Inclusive Health  
Earlier this month we held our first community collaborative for intellectual disabilities inclusive health. We were joined by Special Olympics Hawaii athletes and their family members, representatives from Kaiser Permanente Hawaii, The Queen's Health System, Lanakila Pacific and the Hawaii Pacific Dental Group, as well as members of our Ohana Family Task Force. Together we discussed the challenges and barriers individuals with intellectual disabilities face when seeking healthcare. The goal of the community collaborative is to find solutions to these barriers and implement them locally, helping to create a more inclusive healthcare system in Hawaii. Further meetings will be held throughout 2024 to continue this collaborative discussion on more inclusive health for our athletes.

### The Launch of Our New Gardening Club

To kick off the new year, we will launch our first-ever Gardening Club in January 2024. The club will be led by one of our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes and staff members, Ho'opi'o Balaz. Ho'opi'o shared, "Not only is the Gardening Club a new opportunity for us, it's also a new learning experience." For more information and to join the Gardening Club, please email Ho'opi'o at: [hbalaz@sohawaii.org](mailto:hbalaz@sohawaii.org).

## The Guardian: Hearts Light Up During Holiday Classic



Last month Special Olympics Hawaii held their 2023 Holiday Classic, which included an opening ceremony that would rival all celebrations. As a part of the ceremony, the organization honored and recognized the Provost Marshal Office (PMO) of the Marine Corps Base Hawaii (MCBH) for their tremendous efforts and support in 2023.

While being celebrated by hundreds of athletes and Special Olympics Hawaii family members, a team of 12 PMO officers escorted the Flame of Hope and lit the cauldron with Special Olympics Molokai athlete, Tiffany, signifying the opening of the games for this year's Holiday Classic. Many of the officers who escorted the Flame of Hope have been dedicated supporters of Law Enforcement Torch Run events for several years. They regularly run in the the annual First Hawaiian Bank Troy Barboza Law Enforcement Torch Run, as well as volunteer as award presenters for competitions, and most recently were the record-breaking team for our annual Badges and Buckets fundraiser. In 2023, MCBH PMO raised over \$25,000 for Special Olympics Hawaii.

Ms. Leilani Chargualaf and Officer Jenna Folks shared what Special Olympics Hawaii meant to them and they both said, "It gives us great joy in our hearts to help support all these amazing athletes. We are strong believers in the program because it gives all those athletes an opportunity to pursue their passion and play their hearts out. We are truly grateful to be able to partner with such an amazing organization."

Mahalo nui loa for all of your support! Your dedication and support has truly made an impact on the lives of our athletes.

## Sponsor Feature: Elite Parking Services

As the year comes to an end, we want to extend a huge mahalo to one of our Year-Round Supporters, Elite Parking Services. Along with being a Silver Medal Sponsor of our State Summer Games and an All-Star Table Sponsor of our annual Cheer for Champions Gala, Elite Parking Services is always looking for ways to fuel support for our athletes – whether it's providing valet services for our events, participating in the Over The Edge fundraiser, or volunteering at our sports competitions and awarding medals. Our organization was also selected as one of the nonprofits who benefitted from the 2023 Elite Resolution Challenge.



We would also like to extend a sincere mahalo to Executive Vice President/Partner, Nina Nakaahiki for her commitment, leadership and support. She also serves on our Board of Directors as vice chair and was the event co-chair for our Cheer for Champions committee. Elite Parking Services continues to drive our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes forward with their exceptional work, dedication to excellence and generous giving. We are grateful and truly appreciative for their incredible support.



### Join Us At These Upcoming Events

- The next Health Corner will be conducted over Zoom on Monday, January 15, 2024.
- Boogie on down to our Virtual Dance Party held on Friday, January 26, 2024 over Zoom.
- Special Olympics Hawaii will host its Health and Wellness Conference, February 3-4, 2024, at the Ala Moana Hotel Conference Center.
- As we prepare for a safe and fun 2024 season, join us at our Oahu MedFest event with Kaiser Permanente on Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at the Kaiser Permanente Hawaii Mapunapuna Clinic and receive a free medical screening.

For more information on these events or if you would like to join one of our Holoholo Walking Clubs, please contact Emily at: [ha@sohawaii.org](mailto:ha@sohawaii.org).



### Our Young Athletes Had Ball of Fun Celebrating Makahiki

Last month we celebrated our annual Makahiki Young Athletes Event at our Special Olympics Hawaii Sports and Wellness Center. During the event we hosted our first Young Athletes Makahiki Games that included over 50 keiki ages two through seven years old, with and without intellectual disabilities. Activities included Hawaiian cultural games through words and music, along with activities based on the skills our current young athletes have learned through the year. If you're interested in registering your young athlete for 2024, visit [sohawaii.org/initiatives/young-athletes](http://sohawaii.org/initiatives/young-athletes) for more information and to see next year's schedule.



### Mahalo 2023, Aloha 2024!

The entire Special Olympics Hawaii team would like to send warm wishes to you and your ohana this



### Share your Special Story

We'd love to hear from you! If you have a story about your involvement with Special Olympics Hawaii – such



### End of Year Giving

There's still time to make a tax-deductible donation before the end

holiday season. We'd also like to extend a big mahalo to all of our staff, volunteers, coaches, and athletes for making 2023 such an amazing year – we can't wait to see you in 2024!

as a volunteer, coach, official or family member – we would love to hear from you! Please email your interest and some information on your story to our PR team at [crystalclearcomms@gmail.com](mailto:crystalclearcomms@gmail.com). We can't wait to see what kind of stories you'll share!

of the year! Checks can be made out to:

Special Olympics Hawaii  
91-610 Maunakapu Street  
Ewa Beach, HI, 96706

Mahalo nui loa for your support.

Special Olympics Hawaii | 91-610 Maunakapu St, Ewa Beach, HI 96706

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