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Hawaii



Special Olympics Hawaii Newsletter: November 2024

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What's Going On at Special Olympics Hawaii?

Special Olympics Hawaii's Holiday Classic Decks the Courts This Weekend!



This weekend hundreds of athletes from across the state are ready to "sleigh" the competition as they gather for Special Olympics Hawaii's annual Holiday Classic at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and Marine Corps Base Hawaii. The two-day event includes a multi-division basketball tournament, with an Individual Skills Competition; a bowling tournament featuring singles and unified teams, as well as a bocce tournament with both traditional and unified doubles teams. Athletes statewide have been training and competing in area and regional competitions for months to prepare for the Holiday Classic.

Youth Ambassadors Reflect on a Life-Changing Experience in Washington D.C.

by David Braman



Unified Partner David Braman and Athlete Jayden McCleign at Special Olympics Inc. (October 2024)

I am honored to announce that Jayden McCleign and I have been selected as U.S Youth Ambassadors for

Special Olympics! We are joining a group of young leaders from across the country, united in our efforts to promote inclusion and acceptance. The Youth Ambassador program empowers students to advocate, raise awareness, and build inclusive communities in schools and beyond.

Our adventure to Washington D.C., for our onboarding as U.S. Youth Ambassadors was one of the coolest experiences of my entire life. Few things in this world bring together a group of students who are such good leaders, advocates, and promoters of the Unified Generation quite like Special Olympics. My biggest takeaway was the feeling I had being near all of those people. I remember feeling honored to just be in the same room as them, but when I realized that we were one of them, I felt a great sense of pride, gratitude, and a responsibility to earn our title every day.

During the onboarding experience, we attended many sessions. Topics included public speaking, online safety, and how to best represent the Unified Generation. While I gained great insights during these discussions, I learned the most by observing the other Youth Ambassadors. I learned that the best way to be a leader is to be yourself in the most authentic way possible and to recognize the power that authenticity can have.

While there was a lot of business to get done during our onboarding experience, a lot of fun was had as well. We sang and danced with our new friends during karaoke night, and I even got to rep my Special Olympics gear on twin day. I have firm confidence that the bonds that we created over those two days are strong enough to last for a very long time.

"Being a part of the Youth Ambassador program for Special Olympics has been such an amazing experience. It's teaching me how to be a better person, like helping other people despite having disabilities, and even getting a chance to participate. I just went to Washington D.C., last weekend for onboarding and attended many sessions that were really cool. We talked about using social media safely and the importance of being a good role model. We even talked about how to talk to others about inclusion. My goal this year is to help more people learn about Special Olympics" said Special Olympics Hawaii Athlete, Jayden McCleign.

I feel so honored to be in this new position as a Youth Ambassador. Getting to go on this journey with my friend Jayden makes it a hundred times better. My biggest goal as a Youth Ambassador is to spread our message about the importance of inclusion to as many people as possible. I can't wait to see where this takes us, and I am grateful to everyone who has helped us get to this point.

Honokaa Hawks Take Texas by Storm



In September, the Honokaa Hawks, a delegation from Special Olympics East Hawaii, traveled to Austin, Texas, to compete in the Special Olympics Texas Fall Classic 2024 in Midland/Odessa. The trip was filled with memorable experiences, starting with a vibrant hula performance at the Opening Ceremonies that

delivered the Aloha Spirit to the Lone Star State and earned rave reviews from the crowd. Beyond the competition, the delegation had the chance to explore Austin's rich culture and attractions, including a tour of the State Capitol, a visit to Down Home Ranch in Elgin, and a stop at the Exotic Resort Zoo in Johnson. They also enjoyed iconic Texas experiences, such as trips to Buc-ee's, Texas Roadhouse, and Whataburger, as well as shopping at Trader Joe's.

"To get to Texas, it took a lot of fundraising to gather everything we needed for the trip. In Texas, we had so much fun—cruising around the sights, eating different kinds of food—but the best thing for me was meeting new friends, hanging out with the Texas people, and feeling all the Aloha they gave us," said Michael Rincon, Special Olympics Hawaii athlete.

The trip proved to be an unforgettable experience for everyone involved—coaches, athletes, and staff alike.

"I kept asking those in my van if it was worth working hard to raise money for, and the answer was always a resounding yes. This is definitely something they will remember for a very long time," said Cheryl Hoshino, Special Olympics East Hawaii Area Director.

Congratulations to the following:

Cynthia Elizares - Gold (singles bocce)

Gilbert Acosta - Silver (singles bocce)

Shallen Guerrero - 4th Place (singles bocce)

Shallen Guerrero and Gilbert Acosta Gold (bocce doubles)

Cynthia Elizares and Gail Elizares - Bronze (unified doubles)

The team also brought home a gold medal in coach pitch softball. Way to go, Honokaa Hawks!

The Guardian: Carrying the Flame of Hope to San Antonio



Hawaii officers pictured with Chief Richard LeMunyon, Founder of the Law Enforcement Torch Run

Guardians of the Flame from the Hawaii Police Department, Honolulu Police Department, Kauai Police Department, and Maui Police Department recently gathered in San Antonio, Texas, for the 2024 International Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) Conference, marking another milestone in their commitment to Special Olympics athletes. The conference, which brought together over 1,200 law enforcement officers from around the world, provided a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences, and strengthen the global network of law enforcement agencies dedicated to supporting Special Olympics.

The LETR is one of the largest grassroots fundraisers and public awareness campaigns for Special

Olympics, and Hawaii's law enforcement officers have been enthusiastic participants for more than 39 years. From organizing Torch Runs to raising funds for local athletes, they have played a key role in enhancing the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities across the islands.

A highlight of the conference was the keynote address from a Special Olympics athlete, who shared their personal journey and the transformative impact that the Torch Run and Special Olympics have had on their life. These heartfelt stories underscored the vital role law enforcement officers play in supporting the Special Olympics mission. In addition to the educational sessions and networking opportunities, officers participated in a Torch Run, where our very own Sgt. Jason Grouns carried the Flame of Hope into The Alamo.



"These conferences motivate and inspire newer officers to find their "WHY" and they are really excited to bring their ideas back home and help grow our LETR programs on all islands. This conference is a great team bonding event with the potential to build new LETR leaders for Hawaii. Watching our team get excited rejuvenates and inspires me every time," said State Torch Run Director and Assistant Chief, Ryan Nishibun.



As they return to Hawaii, the officers are eager to continue their work with Special Olympics Hawaii, providing opportunities for athletes to train, compete, and succeed. Their dedication is a testament to the power of community and the positive impact that law enforcement can have on the lives of those they serve.

Expanding Keiki Care Through Free Pediatric Screenings



Effective early childhood development (ECD) and early intervention services are vital components for young children. Recognizing this need, Special Olympics has expanded screenings to include pediatric comprehensive medical assessments through the Healthy Young Athletes program. Dr. Erika Phelps-Nishiguchi, Special Olympics Hawaii Clinical Director from Hawaii Pacific Health, will lead the program alongside other health professionals and medical students. Dr. Phelps-Nishiguchi is passionate about early childhood development, early intervention, and providing support for young children and their families. The assessments include vision, hearing, and dental screenings, developmental surveillance, and physical examinations. These screenings offer parents a safe space to share their experiences, discuss their child's development, and connect with social and support networks.

Early identification and intervention are key components to fostering a child's development for future success. The program also connects families with essential community resources and healthcare providers. These connections not only support families but also increase health professionals' understanding of the unique needs of children with disabilities.

Pediatric screenings will be available at Special Olympics Hawaii's 2024 Makahiki Pa'ani Young Athletes event on **Saturday, December 7, 2024, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.** The event is open to all children ages 2-7 with or without disabilities. For more information or to register for the Young Athlete's Makahiki Pa'ani event, contact Nip at program@sohawaii.org or 808-695-3523. For information about the pediatric screenings, please contact Tina at ha@sohawaii.org or 808-695-3532.



Sponsor Feature:

SAFEWAY 
— Foundation —

Mahalo to Safeway Foundation for continuing to be a Year-Round Supporter! Since 2016, Safeway Foundation has been supporting Special Olympics Hawaii through grant awards and has selected us as one of the beneficiaries of their annual in-store fundraising campaign. This year, the Safeway Foundation presented us with a \$45,000 donation, and to date, has donated \$430,000 to support our athletes.

“For nearly a decade, we have been deeply grateful for the Safeway Foundation’s unwavering dedication to Special Olympics Hawaii,” said Dan Epstein, President & CEO of Special Olympics Hawaii. “Their generous support empowers our athletes to train and compete at no cost to themselves or their families, while helping us advance our mission of building a more inclusive community. We extend our heartfelt mahalo to the entire Safeway Foundation team for their continued efforts in celebrating our athletes and championing their valuable contributions to our community.”

Local Safeway stores also continue to support our annual Badges and Buckets fundraiser. The 2024 Badges and Buckets fundraiser included seven shopping centers that have Safeway as the anchor store. Safeway customers helped to raise \$92,450 at those seven locations. Mahalo to Safeway Foundation and our local Safeway stores for your commitment to enhancing the lives of our athletes both on and off the playing field.



Planned Giving

One of the most important gifts you can give to your family, friends and community is a future where each person is accepted and appreciated for their unique strengths. Learn more about how you can leave a lasting impact when you include Special Olympics Hawaii in your will, by visiting bit.ly/plannedgivinghawaii.

Combined Federal Campaign

Each fall, the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) provides federal employees and retirees with the chance to support their favorite charities. The 2024 CFC runs now through January 15, 2025. Visit givecfc.org and use charity code 43725 to make a donation and meaningful impact for Special Olympics Hawaii.

Share your Special Story

If you have a story about your involvement with Special Olympics Hawaii – such as a volunteer, coach, official or family member – we would love to hear from you! Please email your story to our PR team at crystalclearcomms@gmail.com. We can't wait to see what kind of stories you'll share!

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