



Special Olympics Hawaii Newsletter: October 2024

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What's Going On at Special Olympics Hawaii?

Unified Basketball Tournament Scores Big on Inclusion and Teamwork



Iolani High School was the site of an inspiring Unified Basketball tournament that brought together six teams from four elementary schools across Oahu. Teams from Ala Wai Elementary, Daniel K Inouye Elementary, Hahaione Elementary, and Pauoa Elementary gathered for a day filled with fun, teamwork, and friendly competition.

The tournament was held on Sunday, October 6, as part of the Oahu Area Regional Basketball Tournament. In total, 14 teams competed in the event, eight traditional Special Olympics teams, from five delegations; The Ducks, Na Ali'i, Pirates, Terminators, and Rainbows; along with the six unified teams representing the Unified Champion School Program.

"The joy and jubilation on the keiki's faces told it all," said Dale Arakaki, principal of Pauoa Elementary. "I was most impressed with the compassion that these players showed to each other and their opponents. The children shared the ball willingly and made sure everyone got a chance to shine. They unselfishly gave up the ball so others could shoot, and not just once, but many times. The competitive drive was there; however, it was overshadowed by the

sheer love they had for each other, making sure that each player had a chance to shine. A person who came to watch their niece play gave the ultimate compliment by saying, 'Your students played with heart and grace.' They were all so unselfish, kind to each other and their opponents, and very respectful."

In Division 1, Ala Wai Elementary claimed the championship title, while Pauoa Elementary won Division 2. Both teams displayed exceptional teamwork and skill throughout the tournament, embodying the event's spirit of camaraderie and inclusion.

Participants from Daniel K. Inouye Elementary also shared enthusiastic reflections on their experiences. Special Olympics athlete Nathan Loya exclaimed, "It was the best day of my life!" while Unified Partner Ashlynn Johnson added, "It was a great experience!" These are just a few examples of the positive feedback the tournament inspired.

This tournament exemplified the mission of the Unified Champion Schools program, fostering friendships, understanding, and unity through sports. It was a day to remember for all involved, celebrating the values of inclusion and kindness.

Special Olympics Hawaii Welcomes Newest Class of Athlete Leaders



Special Olympics Hawaii is proud to announce our newest class of Athlete Leaders: Sarah Ahina, Dorothy Alapai, Ho'opi'o Balaz, Cara Dooley, Tom Galano, Jasmine Humalon, Zariah Niheu, Keison Nishibun, Nikilani Rojas, Shelly Shanahan, and Jack Whitaker.

These athletes were trained by Athlete Leader, Ian Kahalewai and Nip Ho during a two-day session in September. They completed three key training sessions: Introduction to Athlete Leadership, Understanding Athlete Leadership, and Athlete Spokesperson. These sessions are designed to help our athletes build essential skills to become effective Athlete Leaders within the Special Olympics community and confident public speakers.

For their final project, each participant delivered a five-- to seven-minute speech showcasing their growth and dedication to leadership. Special Olympics Hawaii is very excited to see the impact these 11 Athlete Leaders will make and all they will accomplish.

The Guardian: Badges, Buckets, and Big Hearts



We are thrilled to share the success of our 2024 Badges and Buckets law enforcement fundraiser, made possible by the heartfelt support of our Guardians of the Flame. Over three inspiring days and nights, volunteer, off-duty law enforcement officers, athletes, and community members came together to raise much-needed awareness and resources for Special Olympics Hawaii. This event would not have been possible without the dedication and passion of everyone involved.

The Guardians of the Flame are more than just volunteers, they are champions for our athletes, embodying the spirit of inclusivity and empowerment at the core of our mission. Together, we fostered an atmosphere of camaraderie, enthusiasm, and unity, reflecting the essence of what it means to be part of the Special Olympics Hawaii ohana.

Central to our efforts is the LETR (Law Enforcement Torch Run) mission, which connects law enforcement officers, athletes, and the community to raise funds and awareness for our programs. This initiative not only ensures access to vital resources but also fosters meaningful connections between our athletes and the people who support them.

For our athletes, the LETR mission symbolizes far more than financial support—it represents hope, opportunity, and the chance to shine. Every dollar raised helps provide training, equipment, and experiences that empower our athletes to reach their full potential, both on and off the field.

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who participated, donated, and volunteered their time. With your efforts, we have raised over \$270,000 statewide. Your support not only lights the path for our athletes but also ignites a flame that fuels our collective mission. Together, we are proving that when communities unite, extraordinary things are possible.



Garden Club Digs in with Fresh Activities for Fall

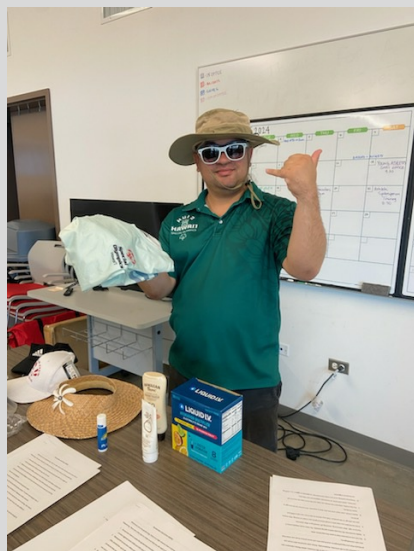


The Special Olympics Hawaii Garden Club has had an exciting season this fall. In September, participants gathered to tend to the garden and prepare for new plantings in October. They also attended an informative educational presentation on sun safety, with sunscreen and hydration packets provided for all members.

In October, 21 participants and family members joined the Garden Club for activities that promote camaraderie and connection—key to overall health and well-being. The event featured a “Planting Seedlings” activity, a Halloween party, and a movie night. Participants, including active Garden Club parent and Special Olympics Hawaii Coach Vicki Graham, brought snacks and creative dishes. Vicki also shared her event planning expertise to co-host the gathering with Garden Club leader Ho’opio Balaz.

Attendees dressed in festive costumes and left with smiles, looking forward to the next event: the Garden Club Thanksgiving Party and Herbal Workshop on Wednesday, November 20 from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Special Olympics Hawaii Health and Wellness Complex in Ewa Beach.

Throughout the fall and spring, special guest presenters from the Oahu UH Master Gardening Program and the Halawa Xeriscape Garden will lead workshops. For more information on how to get involved, visit bit.ly/sohi-garden-club, contact Ho’opio Balaz at hbalaz@sohawaii.org, or reach out to Tina King, Special Olympics Hawaii Health and Wellness Manager, at 808-695-3532 or ha@sohawaii.org. We look forward to welcoming more family and friends to the Garden Club!



Sponsor Feature: Elite Parking Services



Team Elite at Over The Edge: (Left to Right) Maithy Nguyen, Special Olympics Athlete Ho'opi'o Balaz, Ray Mantanona, and Nina Cardano

Mahalo nui loa to Elite Parking Services for their unwavering support of our athletes through event sponsorships, volunteering, and supporting our fundraisers. Recently, they sponsored a team of three employees for our annual Over the Edge fundraiser, where President and Partner Ryan Chun and Vice President and Partner Nina Nakaahiki, along with other dedicated team members, attended the event to cheer on Team Elite. Their commitment to supporting our athletes, the community, and one another is truly inspiring.

Each year, Elite Parking Services also serves as Silver Medal Sponsors of our State Summer Games and runs our Individual Softball Skills Competition. They are also an All-Star Table Sponsor of our Cheer for Champions Gala and provide volunteers and complimentary valet parking services for the event. We are especially grateful for Nina Nakaahiki's leadership as Vice Chair of our Board of Directors and her contributions to the Cheer for Champions committee. Nina has been instrumental in supporting past National Games teams and selecting Special Olympics Hawaii as a beneficiary for Elite Resolution Challenges.

Thank you, Ryan, Nina, and Elite Parking Services, for your exceptional commitment to our athletes! We are proud and grateful for our year-round partnership.



Over the Edge Raises \$179K for Our Athletes!

A heartfelt thank you to all the rappellers who raised funds for our athletes and to the generous donors who made this achievement possible. A special mahalo to our Gold Medal Sponsors, Love's Brand and Hawaii Foodservice Alliance; our Silver Medal Sponsor, Kalaeloa Partners, LLC; and our Event Partners, Honolulu Freight Service, Channel808, Starcomm Wireless, and BrandSafway. We also extend our gratitude to the Honolulu Fire Department and Hawaii Army National Guard for their invaluable support as Rope Volunteers.

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.



Join Us For a “Pint-Sized” Day of Fun at Our Young Athletes Event, November 9!

We invite you to join us at next month’s Young Athletes event on November 9, for all children ages 2-7. Join us for a morning of sports and smiles at the Special Olympics Hawaii Sports and Wellness Center from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. For more details, contact yap@sohawaii.org

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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