



Special Olympics Hawaii Newsletter: April 2025

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What's Going On at Special Olympics Hawaii?

Unified Spotlight: Unified Basketball Tournament Ignites Spirit of Inclusion!



The gym was filled with cheers, high-fives, and unstoppable energy as 11 Unified teams and a spirited cheerleading squad came together for the Kamaaina Kids 3x3 Unified Basketball Tournament at Honouliuli Middle School.

Hosted by Kamaaina Kids in partnership with Special Olympics Hawaii, this high-energy event brought together student-athletes of all abilities for a day filled with fast-paced basketball games, lasting friendships, and loud, proud support from the crowd.

Each team, made up of athletes and partners, played with heart and hustle, showing the true meaning of inclusions and teamwork. But the highlight off the court? The cheerleaders' halftime show! With music pumping and pom-poms flying, the cheer squad lit up the gym with a dazzling performance that had everyone clapping and dancing along.

Here are what some participants had to say:

"My favorite part was when the crowd cheered. It felt like we were all on the same team"

-Kainoa, 5th Grade

"The event is all about creating moments where every student feels seen and included, while having fun playing the game."

From the first tipoff to the last whistle, the spirit of unity and inclusion was strong. Students competed, connected, and created memories that will last far beyond the court.

Spring is in Full Swing at the Health & Wellness Center!



There's no slowing down this season at the Special Olympics Health & Wellness Center! The facility is buzzing with energy as athletes dive into spring training. The Leeward Jaguars, Goodwill and Team Arise Delegations are hitting their stride, practicing three to four days a week to gear up for upcoming competitions.

Powerlifting athlete Bryan Sims has been putting in serious work at the Health & Fitness Building, training hard to build strength and perfect form in preparation for the State Summer Games this June.

Meanwhile, the HoloHolo Walking Club keeps up its weekly pace with regular meetups on Mondays, and Toastmasters continues to empower voices with monthly gatherings on Thursdays.

From focused training sessions to community-building activities, the Health & Wellness Center is alive with dedication, progress, and the spirit of inclusion. It's been incredibly rewarding to see this space evolve into a thriving home base for

our athletes—a place where they can train, connect, and grow together. We're proud to see it serving so many and standing strong as a vibrant symbol of community and support.

Staff Spotlight: Ho'opi'o Balaz

Get to know some of the names and faces that help make Special Olympics Hawaii run.



Ho'opi'oookalani "Ho'opi'o" Balaz is a dedicated athlete and staff member at Special Olympics Hawaii, where he serves as a Project Assistant. Since joining the organization as an athlete in 2018, Ho'opi'o has competed in bowling, bocce, softball, and swimming. He also represented Hawaii in bocce at the 2022 USA Games in Orlando, Florida, earning two gold medals! Beyond athletics, he contributes to Special Olympics Hawaii by leading initiatives like the Garden Club and participating in health and wellness programs.

What high school did you graduate from?

I graduated from Leilehua High School in 2012. Go Mules!

Your favorite memory from a Special Olympics Hawaii event?

I'd say the entirety of the 2022 USA Games was an amazing experience. I traveled from Hawaii all the way to Orlando, got to see a lot of famous people, and played with a few old friends who now live on the continent. I won two gold medals and a fourth-place medal in bocce, while interacting with my teammates—especially the bocce team and meeting people from other states.

If you could compete in just one Special Olympics sport, which one would it be and why?

Bowling. It was the very first SOHI sport I competed in, and it was where I won my first medal, so bowling has always been my favorite. Not to say the other sports I play aren't better, but bowling holds a place in me for being the first sport I played.

If you could share one thing about Special Olympics Hawaii with the community, what would it be?

I would share with the community that it may look like a place of sports, but at the same time, it's also a haven for people with intellectual disabilities like me. I like that we help athletes out in health as well as fitness. It's a place of community.

Sponsor Feature: Fertility Institute of Hawaii

The Fertility Institute of Hawaii remains a dedicated, year-round supporter of Special Olympics Hawaii and has played an active role in uplifting our athletes and advancing our mission. Under the leadership of founder Dr. John Frattarelli—a Special Olympics Hawaii board member, Capital Campaign Chair, Windward Warriors coach, and proud father to athlete Brandon Frattarelli—their impact spans from the playing field to the boardroom.



We are honored to have the Fertility Institute of Hawaii as the Presenting Sponsor for this year's Cheer for Champions Gala. The company will graciously host an additional table of guests, bringing their total contribution to the event to an outstanding \$25,000. Always willing and ready to support Special Olympics Hawaii, they also participated in our Inaugural Truck Pull and Dr. Frattarelli has taken part in Over the Edge and Paradise Plunge.

"We are incredibly grateful to Dr. Frattarelli and the Fertility Institute of Hawaii for their unwavering support and generosity," said Dan Epstein, President & CEO of Special Olympics Hawaii. "Their support not only sustains our programs, but also helps us grow and reach more athletes with life-changing opportunities."

Mahalo to Dr. Frattarelli and the team at the Fertility Institute of Hawaii.

My Day at Honolulu Hale

By Jenna Hasan, Special Olympics Hawaii Athlete

Earlier this year, I was told that I would be honored for my accomplishment of being Athlete of the Year by Councilmember Augie Tulba. I did not realize until I saw him in person that I actually knew him also as a local comedian.

At the event, I received an impressive certificate with the councilmembers' signatures and had the opportunity to tour Honolulu Hale for the first time. It was awesome to learn about this impressive 100-year-old building, inspired by Italian architecture with elements of Native American design (at least on the ceiling of the Mayor's office.) I was impressed by all the beautiful artwork that hung on the walls of the rooms we toured. One such painting was of a white bird called Manu-o-Ku. I was told that in Hawaii, these nestless birds can only be found in Honolulu. These are the kinds of things I love to learn, especially as an artist looking for inspiration. After finishing the tour, some of us took pictures inside a giant bowl; not something I ever thought I'd be doing that day. It was an art installation for the 2025 Hawaii Triennial.



We then went to wait outside for our Handi-Van. Before I left, I got to see the Mayor, who had just arrived. I got a picture with him and my teammates Mathew and Shavanna. Shout-out to Shavanna for making it into the Special Olympics Hall of Fame. You go, girl!

On our way back home, by some bizarre coincidence, our Handi-Van picked up a lady who happened to be Augie's mother. She congratulated me and told us Augie had asked her to make leis for the event. So, some of the ones I was wearing were made by her! What a small world we live in. Overall, it was a truly unique day.

I don't like to make too big of a deal about myself, and honestly, I believe there are many others also deserving of the title of Athlete of the Year. Even so, it was cool to be recognized for this achievement. I'm used to taking longer than my peers to get the hang of things. I never considered myself an athlete, and

didn't think I could improve in what I set out to do at the rate that I did. I give a lot of credit to Special Olympics' friendly environment, my teammates who cheered me on, my supportive Mother, and my wonderful coach, Jim, who saw I had potential and pushed me to try new things.

The Guardian: U.S. Customs Border and Protection Honolulu Carries Flame of Hope



A heartfelt mahalo to the incredible team at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Honolulu for proudly carrying the Flame of Hope as part of the Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) for Special Olympics Hawaii. Their participation reflects the true spirit of LETR of bringing communities together to support inclusion and respect for individuals of all abilities. Recently, we had the great opportunity to meet with CBP officers and share more about the mission of Special Olympics Hawaii. These moments of connection help raise awareness and build lasting relationships that go beyond the torch.

We are deeply grateful for CBP Honolulu's continued support and look forward to growing our partnership in the future. Together, we are lighting the path toward a more accepting and inclusive community!

Young Athletes Summer Games Event



Special Olympics Hawaii will be holding our annual Young Athletes event during the State Summer Games on Friday, June 7, from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. at the University of Hawaii. This inclusive event will welcome over 150 keiki for a morning of movement, connection, and fun. Participants will rotate through pre-sport skills stations, enjoy quiet time activities, and engage in playful activities.

This program is open to children ages 2-7, with or without intellectual disabilities, and offers a meaningful introduction to the world of sports and teamwork. Families interested in participating are encouraged to register in advance. Click the following links for the [Young Athletes flyer](#) and [registration form](#), and email the completed form to program@sohawaii.org to register. Don't miss this opportunity to help your keiki take their first steps towards the world of sports!



Truck Pull Delivers Big For Our Athletes

The Inaugural Coca-Cola Truck Pull & Spring Fest at Kamakana Ali'i was a huge success! With 25 teams pulling a 40,000 pound Coca-Cola truck live entertainment, ono grinds, keiki activities, and a First Responder vehicle display, there was no shortage of strength, spirit, and smiles. Together, we raised \$70,305 to support our local athletes!

Mahalo to our title sponsor Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii – The Odom Corporation, venue sponsor Ka Makana Ali'i, the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics, and our amazing media partners KHON2, KSSK Hawaii and iHeartRadio Hawaii, and Yelp Hawaii. A big shoutout to our vendors, entertainers, volunteers, and community members who came out to support our incredible athletes!



Donate to the Cheer for Champions Auction

It's time to "cheer" for a great cause! Special Olympics Hawaii's annual Cheer for Champions fundraiser is coming up on Friday, June 6, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at University of Hawaii's Les Murakami Stadium. This exciting event provides an incredible opportunity to support athletes with intellectual disabilities, and we invite you to be part of this inspiring evening. We are currently seeking donations for auction items to help make this event a success. If you're interested in making a contribution, please contact Tracey at traceyb@sohawaii.org for more information.



Fuel the Dreams of Local Athletes!

Fueling Dreams is still rolling on! From now through May 26, you can donate at any of the 33 participating Hele stores on Hawaii Island, Maui, and Oahu. Proceeds from this campaign will help drive opportunities for local athletes with intellectual disabilities, providing year-round training and competition at no cost.



Cindy Celebrates 20 Years with SOHI!

20 years of heart, hustle, and impact! Please join us in celebrating our amazing VP of Community Outreach, Cindy Ujimori, who for two decades has given our athletes and organization her time and heart. From championing our mission to inspiring everyone around her, her passion and perseverance make a difference every single day. Mahalo Cindy for all that you do!



Preschool Play Day Fun!

Over 300 keiki from the Leeward District gathered at our Special Olympics Health & Wellness Center for a fun-filled Preschool Play Day. For many of these little ones, this was their very first Play Day and their smiles said it all. Mahalo to our amazing volunteers who helped guide our keiki safely and ran each station with care and aloha!



Unified Champion Track Teams Relays

On April 19, High School Unified Champion track teams hit the ground running at the 78th Annual Punahou Relays! Teams from Campbell, Kaimuki, Mililani, and Nanakuli High Schools gave it their all in the 4x100 and 4x400 events. We are so proud of their teamwork and sportsmanship and can't wait to cheer them on at the 2025 Island Movers Track & Field State Championships in Kona, next month!



Special Olympics Hawaii in the News

- [“Teams gear up for inaugural Truck Pull & Spring Fest at Ka Makana Ali‘i” in Spectrum News](#)
- [“Par Hawaii marks 20 years of Fueling Dreams for Special Olympics Hawai‘i” in Maui Now](#)



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.

Forward to a Friend

Connect With Us!

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!

