



## Special Olympics Hawaii Newsletter: December 2025

Support Our Athletes

### Mission Partners



### Year-Round Partners



### Year-Round Supporters



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



As we close out 2025, I want to extend a heartfelt mahalo to everyone who supported Special Olympics Hawaii and our incredible athletes this year. I am deeply grateful to our athletes and families, staff, volunteers, partners, and donors for your unwavering commitment, time, and generosity. Your support is what makes our mission possible.

This year was filled with meaningful moments and unforgettable experiences, from inspiring competitions and impactful programs to community celebrations that brought people together across the state.

Highlights from 2025 include:

- Our sports programs served athletes across multiple islands — providing training, competition, and the chance to shine in front of their peers and families at over 55 competitions in 10 sports. Athletes had the opportunity to step onto the awards stand

literally thousands of times this past year to be recognized for what they CAN achieve vs what they can't.

- Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the First Hawaiian Bank Troy Barboza Law Enforcement Torch Run, honoring decades of partnership and support from First Hawaiian Bank and law enforcement statewide.
- Our Unified Champion Schools program has expanded to over 80 schools where athletes with and without intellectual disabilities play together — breaking barriers and building friendships that redefine what inclusion looks like in our schools and communities for literally thousands of students.
- Celebrating 20 years of Fueling Dreams with Par Hawaii, whose long-standing partnership continues to make a meaningful impact by supporting athletes statewide.
- We conducted almost 800 health screenings in 8 different disciplines this year catching dozens of concerns that were referred for further care and treatment. Dozens of athletes received prescriptions glasses at no cost and many athletes were able to see a medical professional for the first time in years through our MedFest program.
- Launching a new signature fundraiser, the Inaugural Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii Truck Pull & Spring Fest at Ka Makana Ali'i, bringing the community together in support of our mission.

To our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes, I am incredibly proud of each of you. Your dedication, perseverance, and joy continue to inspire me every day. Watching you train, compete, and support one another reminds us all of the power of inclusion and what's possible when we believe in ourselves and each other. Keep striving, keep believing, and continue giving it your very best.

As we look ahead to 2026, I am filled with excitement for what's to come. Together, we will continue to break barriers, celebrate achievements, and build a more inclusive Hawaii for everyone. Mahalo for being a part of this journey and for helping change lives through sport, health, and community.

Happy Holidays and Hau'oli Makahiki Hou!



Dan Epstein  
President & CEO  
Special Olympics Hawaii

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## International Day of Persons with Disabilities

*By Jenna Hasan, 2024 Female Athlete of the Year, Health Messenger, and Special Olympics Hawaii Athlete*

International Day of Persons with Disabilities, observed on December 3, is a day that brings to light the issues that concern me and my fellow Special Olympics athletes — things like awareness, advocacy, inclusion, accessibility and our rights. Really, every day can be a day for these things, but on this day in particular, we look at and discuss them on a global scale.

Nobody likes to be shamed, excluded, hidden away, or made to feel less than just because they're different. Attitudes towards those with disabilities vary around the world, but the goal is the same: to be treated like humans and given the chance to thrive and pursue happiness just like everyone else.

As I see it, encouraging inclusive attitudes, policies and opportunities through international programs like Special Olympics is one of many ways to improve the lives of those with disabilities on a global scale. Within my community I see the love, joy and enthusiasm that comes from being able to participate in sports beloved worldwide, and so many take pride in being a part of them. To be able to work towards something, improve, feel a sense of accomplishment and cheer for your fellow teammates are important parts of the human experience that everyone should have the chance to enjoy. That is inclusivity.



We must encourage connection and discourage alienation. When we are included, it gives those of us who are often told what we can't do the chance to prove what we can do. To not be left behind, counted out or underestimated means so much to so many.

Days like International Day of Persons with Disabilities are an important reminder, for both ourselves and the world, that inclusion matters and understanding each other leads to a kinder world.

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## A Night to Remember for Joshua Afoa



What an unforgettable evening it was for our Unified Champion Schools ohana! Thanks to this incredible community, the night became a meaningful and joyful moment for Joshua Afoa of Mililani High School and his team. Joshua was honored as the Oahu Male Athlete of the Year, a recognition of his dedication, hard work, and inspiring spirit.

The celebration was filled with energy, pride, and support, reflecting the heart of our mission: inclusion, connection, and community. Coach Erik shared that Joshua is a hard worker and expressed how proud he is of him. Joshua was overcome with joy and could only say, "thank you." Moments like these remind us why Unified Champion Schools matter — bringing people together to create lasting memories and create meaningful impact.

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## The Guardian: Mahalo to Our Guardians of the Flame

To our Guardians of the Flame,

Mahalo for your unwavering support throughout 2025. From Torch Runs to Tip A Cops, from Badges & Buckets to serving as awards presenters, your presence, dedication, and heart have made an incredible difference for our athletes and our movement. You showed up early, stayed late, and stood proudly alongside our athletes — not just at events, but in your daily commitment to inclusion, respect, and opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities. You don't just carry the Flame; you protect what it represents: courage, unity, and hope.



Because of you, our athletes are seen, celebrated, and supported. You are there at the starting line, at the finish line, and everywhere in between by cheering, encouraging, and reminding them that they belong. You are more than partners; you are heroes, role models, and champions of inclusion.

On behalf of Special Olympics Hawaii and the athletes and families we serve, mahalo for all that you do and for standing with us every step of the way. Together, we are building a more inclusive

Hawaii, one event, one athlete, and one act of kindness at a time.

Happy Holidays to you and your ohana — wishing you joy, health, and safety!

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## Volunteers Needed for 2026 Events



As we close out the year, we want to extend a heartfelt thank you to every volunteer who showed up, stepped in, and supported our athletes at events throughout the year. Your time, energy, and commitment make a real difference, and we are forever grateful for the incredible community that stands behind Special Olympics Hawaii. We truly could not do this without you.

We wish you and your loved ones a happy holiday season and a joyful, healthy new year. Thank you for being such an important part of our ohana.

### Looking Ahead to the New Year

We are excited to kick off Flag Football in February 2026 and are looking for volunteers to help make these events a success:

#### Flag Football Volunteer Dates and Locations:

- February 2 – Mililani High School | 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- February 3 – Kaimuki High School | 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- February 21 – Honouliuli Middle School | 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

#### Volunteer Roles Needed (All Dates and Locations):

- Field managers
- Scorekeepers
- Announcers
- Ball retrievers
- Box holders
- Individual Skills Competition support
- Special ops
- Volunteer check-in
- Awards presenters

If you're looking for a meaningful way to start the new year, we would love to have you join us on the field. Your support helps create an organized, fun, and memorable experience for our athletes.

Mahalo again for all that you do — we can't wait to see you in 2026!

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## Mahalo to Debbie Kobayakawa of the Ohana Task Force

We extend a heartfelt mahalo to Debbie Kobayakawa for her years of service to Special Olympics Hawaii. Debbie has served on the Special Olympics Hawaii Ohana Task Force (OTF) since 2008 and as chairperson since 2022. As the parent of a former Special Olympics athlete, her commitment continued even after her son, Ian, retired from competitions. Her deep knowledge and genuine love and dedication to supporting all parents, especially those new to raising children with special needs, have been invaluable to Special Olympics Hawaii. She will be missed greatly. Mahalo Debbie for your years of service and your lasting impact on the community.


Taking over the role of chairperson will be Kimo and Kelly Anderson, who have served on the Ohana Task Force for 10 years. We are confident our ohana will continue to be well represented.



## Health and Wellness Corner: Upcoming Poet Workout Session

Our Hale 'O Mauiola program recently hosted two successful balance, flexibility, and strength training classes attended by athletes, parents, and delegation heads. Most recently, Coehn Nakasone of the Whittier College baseball team also led a strength training workout session, known as the Poet Workout, for athletes. Participants were guided through a dynamic session focused on building strength and overall athletic performance. Those interested in joining Coehn for the December 23 work out can register by scanning the QR code.

We will continue to expand our fitness program in 2026 with yoga and other strength-building programs. All athletes and family members must complete the Fitness Center waiver form prior to participating in any classes, which can be found at [bit.ly/sohi-fitness-center-waiver](https://bit.ly/sohi-fitness-center-waiver).

**COME WORK OUT WITH COEHN  
NAKASONE FROM WHITTIER  
COLLEGE**

When: December 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>  
Time: 5:00 to 6:00PM


December 23<sup>rd</sup> / 9am to 10am



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

**PROGRAM GOALS:**

- Full Body Strength
- Cardio & Fat Burn
- Power Core Building

TO REGISTER, PLEASE SCAN  
QR CODE OR CONTACT ME  
WITH QUESTIONS



Contact: Kris Nakasone  
Email: [health@sohawaii.org](mailto:health@sohawaii.org)  
Phone: (808) 221-8076

## Sponsor Feature: American Medical Response



As we look back on 2025, we want to send a big mahalo to the amazing team at American Medical Response (AMR) for being there for our Special Olympics Hawaii athletes, coaches, and families all year long. From keeping everyone safe at competitions to supporting our community events, AMR has been a constant source of care and support.

From Area and State competitions to fundraising events, AMR has been there from the first event to the last. But it is not just about what they do — it is how they do it. Whether providing care to an athlete or cheering from the sidelines, AMR brings heart and dedication that go above and beyond.

We also want to extend our gratitude to AMR's Assistant Chief of Oahu Operations, Danny Kao, for his leadership and commitment. Danny has built an incredible team that truly cares about our mission and our athletes, and we couldn't be more grateful for everything they do.

Mahalo nui loa to AMR for being such an important part of the Special Olympics Hawaii ohana. Your support means the world to us.



### Combined Federal Campaign

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) offers federal employees and retirees the opportunity to give back to causes they care about. The campaign is open through January 31, 2026. To make a difference in the lives of Special Olympics Hawaii athletes, visit [givecfc.org](http://givecfc.org) and use our charity code 43725. Your donation will help us continue our mission of creating a more inclusive community for all.

Create a legacy of giving:  
**empower future athletes**

[DOWNLOAD ESTATE PLANNING TOOLS](#)

### 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](http://bit.ly/plannedgivinghawaii).

Forward to a Friend

Connect With Us!

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### 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\*\*](mailto:crystalclearcomms@gmail.com). We can't wait to see what kind of stories you'll share!

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

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