

University of Cincinnati Volleyball Partnership

By Leslie Daly

Relationships are based on many things... connections, shared interest, friendship. The relationship shared between the three Special Olympics volleyball teams and Volleyball Head Coach Molly Alvey of the University of Cincinnati Lady Bearcats has become a treasured friendship.



The friendship began in 2012 when Molly Alvey was named as Head Coach for the UC Lady Bearcats. Then SOHC Coach Elizabeth Daly and Volleyball Coordinator Leslie Daly approached Coach Alvey about holding joint volleyball clinics with SOHC athletes.



Three years later with multiple volleyball clinics, practices and games attended, the relationship between the 2 organizations is rock solid. So solid, in fact, that each April, SOHC begins their Spring season with Coach Molly and team in charge of running warm-up's, drills, then followed by a unified scrimmage and tailgater. The experience is, to put it simply, amazing...

Shared interest comes from the love of the sport. Behind the University of Cincinnati team bench at Fifth Third Arena during any home game, you will find SOHC athletes. With each bump, set and spike, SOHC athletes are there cheering the Bearcats on and with each bump, set and spike, the Bearcats are cheering us on. The admiration is shared and it is deep, and from this mutual admiration, friendships have emerged. UC players know our athletes by name and by heart. When UC senior and libero Jamie Netisingha played her last game in November, after pictures and photos were taken, she looked in the crowd for her #2, SOHC athlete Abby Fovel. Abby wore Jamie's jersey (#2) to every game, talked to Jamie after every game, and met Jamie's parents from Chicago after every game.



From the mini volleyballs thrown into the hands of SOHC athletes in the stands during UC home games, to the signed volleyball UC donates each year to the Serve-a-thon fundraiser, to the donation of gently used ball carts and balls to SOHC teams, UC and SOHC are friends in every sense. Each year, as we say goodbye to graduating seniors, we begin the process of forming new bonds and new friendships. It is a win - win relationship. Every single one of us benefits from the other and the hope is that as we each move forward, we take a memory, an impression, a friendship with us.

"We have seen personalities grow with confidence, increased self-esteem, conversational skills and increased activity. Our own players benefit in the same ways. The relationship continues to grow." -UC Head Coach Molly Alvey



A Message from the President of the Board

By Eric Landen



In this issue of the *Torchbearer*, we profile four of the great programs that SOHC coordinates throughout the year and the coaches, volunteers, and athletes that make each of those programs successful. The programs featured in this issue are a great example of SOHC's commitment to providing recreation and sports programming for Special Olympics athletes from age two through adulthood.

Many athletes first get involved in SOHC programs through the Young Athletes Program, profiled on page 6. As a parent of two young children, I know how important it is for all young athletes to have opportunities to socialize and play; SOHC's Young Athletes Program provides a constructive environment with activities specially tailored to the unique needs of children with intellectual disabilities and their families. I'd like to express my gratitude to Janet Smith and Christine Rose for having the vision and drive to start and coordinate the Young Athletes Program. We look forward to the program continuing to thrive as an avenue for athletes and their families to start their lifelong involvement with Special Olympics.

Involvement in Special Olympics continues through SOHC's work with local schools to provide programming outside of the school day. The profile of SOHC's work with the Southwest Local School District on page 6 is a wonderful model for the development of swimming, track, and nutrition programs to support Southwest students, who are also Special Olympics athletes.

Special Olympics athletes continue to be involved in sports and recreation after graduation and the stories about SOHC's partnership with the UC women's volleyball team and the Unified Softball League (thanks to the efforts of Dave Troup) are examples of opportunities for adult athletes to live out the mission of Special Olympics of developing physical fitness, demonstrating courage, experiencing joy, and participating in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Of course, none of these programs and partnerships would be possible without the involvement of our volunteers and the financial support of SOHC's contributors. As you plan your year-end charitable contributions, please use the envelope in this issue to make a charitable gift to SOHC.

On a personal note, after four years in this position I will soon be passing the baton to a new board president of SOHC. It has been an honor to lead the board of this organization and I would like to express my deep gratitude for the effort and commitment of my fellow board members and the staff of SOHC. My favorite SOHC event is the Spring bowling tournament; while my role with SOHC will change, I look forward to seeing you there as the athletes fill the lanes and go for the gold!



The Envelope

By Jim O'Connell

I watched the recent telecast of the Special Olympics World Games from Los Angeles with great excitement and interest. This event is the culmination of extensive training by athletes from around the world and shows that while these athletes each have their own unique challenges, hard work and focus allow them to be the best they can. A special congratulations goes to Sheryl Fairbanks from Special Olympics Hamilton County who won Gold and Silver medals as well as a 4th place ribbon in Bocce Ball. Your efforts inspired us to be the best we can be too.



When Special Olympics was founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968, one of the objectives of the organization was that there be no barriers to participation among otherwise eligible athletes. Thus began the practice of free participation for all athletes. Special Olympics Hamilton County has supported this practice since the beginning and will continue to do so, as it's the "right thing to do". Our goal has always been to expand the organization to include all eligible athletes in the activities of the organization. That said, a couple of points of clarification are necessary:

- Special Olympics is NOT affiliated with United Way. Therefore, we receive NO funds from the annual \$61,000,000.00 campaign here in Greater Cincinnati.
- Special Olympics Hamilton County is NOT directly subsidized by either Special Olympics Ohio or Special Olympics, Inc.

As a result, all funds to support the structure and activities of Special Olympics Hamilton County must be raised locally. The amount needed to deliver the current level of programs and services is in excess of \$300,000.00 annually and is derived through 3 main areas;

- Fundraisers like the annual Cincinnati Corporate Olympics and annual Fall Golf Outing.
- Grants from Foundations to support specific activities
- Donations from civic and employee groups, companies and from families and friends like yourselves

While both fund-raisers and grants provide a significant level of funding, without the support of families and friends like yourselves, SOHC would not be able to provide the opportunities it does. While your Board has some interesting ideas to invigorate the fundraisers for next year, grants are going to continue to be an issue. With current levels of government funding at all levels for services continuing to shrink annually, foundations have been asked to do more. Couple this with the weak investment picture as a whole, foundations are giving less money to more organizations less often. As grants make up a significant part of the annual budget, the short fall must be made up somewhere. Here is our appeal to you:

In this, and every, newsletter you will see a solicitation envelope. Realize that donations made, in this envelope only, go directly to Special Olympics Hamilton County. As you make your year-end donation choices, please consider a gift to Special Olympics Hamilton County. We have exciting growth and program plans for 2016 and with your help; we can bring these plans to fruition to serve more deserving citizens.

Can't give right now?

Don't throw the envelope away!

Each envelope represents an opportunity for SOHC to further our mission. **Pass it along** to someone who may be able to give a donation!

“Commissioner” of the Unified Softball League Retiring

By Ben Melillo

22 years ago Dave Troup got a group of buddies together to have some fun and give back while playing a game they loved. Volunteers mixed with Special Olympic Athletes to play unified softball. They quickly built relationships, and the games became less “volunteer” and more about coming together to laugh and connect. Today, thanks in large part to the countless hours of dedication by Dave, those Tuesday summer nights at Oskamp fields on the West Side of Cincinnati are still filled with the crack of the bat and the cheerful sounds of families and friends. Dave’s whole family is involved. Steve is a Special Olympian and plays on the team. Patrick played as a partner and Karen is there to cheer them on.



Dave and his family (L to R: Patrick, Karen, Steve, Dave)

Dave is retiring from his position as Commissioner, but he’s not ready to walk away just yet. He’ll continue to help coach a team sponsored by Shake It Records and stay involved in the program. Janet Smith, SOHC Director, said, “For over 20 years, Dave has been the ‘face’ of the Unified Softball Volunteer Program. If it were not for his dedication, it would not have succeeded. We are very thankful for his dedication.”

Dave started with Special Olympics in 1980 as a part-time volunteer in track and bowling. By the mid 80’s he started running various events and in 1994 he started the Unified Softball League becoming its unofficial “Commissioner”. Each year, he recruited and organized participants for the teams. Because this is a unified sport, there are often up to 10 athletes and 10 partners per team. During his tenure the League has grown significantly in the number of players, volunteers, and sponsors. He has served as an amazing advocate for the League and for Special Olympics Hamilton County.

Dave said he couldn’t have done it without the help of the Cincinnati Recreation Commission and the many loyal local businesses that sponsor the softball teams. He is proud of the established group of coaches, volunteers and teams. But most of all, he wants to thank the athletes and their families that have made the games so special for so many years. He is ready to pass the torch, and knows the league is in a good place.



As Dave thinks back over the years, he has a lot of great memories. But he doesn’t remember who won or lost. What he remembers most are the people – people with and without disabilities, from many different backgrounds - all coming together to have fun. Nothing could be better as the sun sets on another summer night.

For information about volunteering or joining a Unified Softball Team, contact Janet Smith at 513-271-2606 or smithj@zoomtown.com. You can also visit: www.specialolympics-hc.org.

South West Local School District Teachers Give the Gift of Sports

By Mollie Wheeler

The summer months have come to a close and school is back in full swing, buzzing with activity. When many of us reflect on our school days, memories of friendships, teachers, classes, clubs, and sports come to mind. However, for many students in the Southwest Local School District, some of these critical activities were simply not available. "After my first few years of teaching, I realized so many of my students were not getting involved in anything outside of the school day. Whether it was fear of the unknown, lack of transportation... whatever the situation was, parents and students alike were just not getting involved."

After encouragement from another high school Special Olympics coach, and with the full support of the SWLSD Administration, it was determined Harrison High, Harrison Jr. High, and Whitewater Valley Elementary were the perfect fit for a Special Olympics program. The program currently has over 40 student athletes. Special Olympics Hamilton County gives these students the opportunity to participate in sports and events that they may not otherwise get outside of school. Harrison High School teacher Cassie Montgomery says, "It motivates them to work harder, builds confidence, teaches them to be part of a team and helps keep them physically active."



The success of any program relies on the commitment of its leaders, and SWLSD is very fortunate to have wonderful coaches in Molly Peters, Lisa Niesen, Jamielyn Johnson, Emily Holbert, Cassie Montgomery, Abby Sherwood, and Emily Williams. The amazing success stories these women shared could fill this entire newsletter. At this year's Hamilton County Special Olympic Swim Event, for example, many athletes successfully overcame their obstacles and fears. Whether it was swimming without a swim belt for the first time, overcoming anxiety issues in noisy crowds or beating a personal best, they all exceeded expectations.

The SWLSD coaches offer encouragement and advice for other teachers and school districts who want to get involved: build relationships and start slow. Choose a sport/specialty in which you have a personal interest and attend one event each quarter. For those with time to donate, there are numerous ways to help. "Our swim coach has attended our trainings. The track coach recruited his athletes to help our Special Olympians. A science teacher had students plan a lesson to teach nutrition to some of our SO athletes, and the Spanish teacher had her 4th year students plan activities for Cinco de Mayo. Once teachers see the benefit to 'their students', as well as the Special Olympians, the possibilities are endless! It may feel a bit overwhelming at the beginning, but you will NOT regret your efforts when you see what it means to the athletes!" –Cassie Montgomery.

The skills each of these students demonstrate through their participation in Special Olympics Hamilton County may not show up any mandated test, but each student has exceeded a year's worth of growth, and most importantly, experienced how it feels to overcome challenges and take pride in their accomplishments!



Mary Lee Tracy, the US Olympic Gymnastics' Coach, opens up her facility and coaches to train our athletes for the Gymnastics event. Between navigating the different surfaces, stretching and moving in ways they are not used to, and performing skill sets for others --- it is amazing to see the growth of the athletes at this event physically, socially, and personally! It's one of the athletes' favorite events.

Young Athletes Program: The YAPletes *By Angela Rockstroh & Christine Rose*

The Young Athletes Program (YAP) is open to children with mental and developmental disabilities ages 2 through 7 years old. Since individuals cannot begin competitive Special Olympic training until age 8, YAP is a great way to transition into the more structured competitive games. YAP meets once a week for a 10 week program, separated by a 3 week break, before starting the next session. Programs are located on the East and West side of Cincinnati, and YAP is always looking to expand to new locations, in order to provide easy access to the YAPletes.

Young Athletes Program includes children with intellectual disabilities and their families to the world of Special Olympics by pursuing the following goals:

- engage children with intellectual disabilities through developmentally appropriate play activities designed to foster
- physical, cognitive and social development;
- welcome family members of children with intellectual disabilities to the Special Olympics network of support;
- raise awareness about the abilities of children with intellectual disabilities through inclusive peer participation, demonstration and other events.



Christine Rose has been working with YAP for 6 years, “We have fun with music, games, obstacle courses, parachutes, and of course learning sports! This is a partner program so we have partners join the athletes in participating in our program. The partners are parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, and peers. It is amazing to see the partners and athletes learn to play together.”

Featured YAPlete Brooklyn Schmitz:



Brooklyn & partner/cousin Noah

“Over the past 3 years, Brooklyn has grown as an individual and as an athlete as a result of the YAP. She started attending the classes at the age of 3 and it was more of a socialization time for her in the beginning. We wanted her to engage with other children through play and structured activities and the Young Athletes Program seemed to be a good fit. While Brooklyn still enjoys the socialization aspect, she has since grown into an athlete and a team player. She has an understanding of what it means to be a team player as well as learning sports through the program. Physically the program has improved her coordination skills and has given her a sense of self confidence. As Brooklyn nears the end of YAP, we are looking forward to her participation in other Special Olympics activities. She has her eye on swimming!” -Kim Schmitz (Brooklyn’s Mom)



Upcoming Fundraisers



NEW! Mama Mimi's Take and Bake

Pizza Fundraiser: For the month of December (2015) go to any Mama Mimi's location and mention the SOHC, 25% of your purchase will benefit our athletes!

NEW! SOHC College Olympics: On November 18, 2015 from 6pm to 8pm at the TUC Great Hall, University of Cincinnati students will have a chance to compete in a series of fun and whacky games with our athletes.

Champions Ball *Winning with Special Olympics*

Saturday, April 2, 2016
20th Century Theater
7:00pm to 10:00pm

Cincinnati Corporate Olympics

Wednesday, July 13, 2016
Fountain Square, Cincinnati
Noon to 1:30



SOHC Golf Outing

September date TBD
TPC River's Bend, Maineville
1:00 p.m. - Shot-gun start



Polar Plunge

On February 6, 2016, you can Jump into the Fun at Joe's Crab Shack at Newport on the Levee for the 16th Annual Special Olympics Polar Plunge event...you won't regret it or forget it!

SOHC will have a team called the "SOHC Freezecats".
Come join our team for lots of fun!

To sign up, go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/156052611412725/1>

Click "Register Here" 2) click to Agree to the terms 3) Join a team 4) Choose "Special Olympics Hamilton County" 5) Create a username and password 6) Donate & 7) Share with all of your friends.

Don't like the thought of jumping in cold water in February? You can be a "Chicken" and still raise money for Special Olympics. Join us chickens as we cheer on our fellow Freezecats!

If the Special Olympics Hamilton County team raises \$6,000 Janet Smith and some other people will dress up like chickens in support of all the jumpers and do the chicken dance. So Spread the word to be "Freezin for a Reason!"



Interested in joining us for one of our great events?

For information on any of our Fundraisers, please see our website at www.specialolympics-hc.org or contact Angela Rockstroh at arockstroh@zoomtown.com or 513-271-2606.



The Piggest Raffle Ever!

For just \$5 you can help Special Olympics Hamilton County and be entered to win a \$10,000 cash (\$5,000 to winning ticket holder and \$5,000 to the charity who sold the ticket)

*All \$5 will be donated to
Special Olympics Hamilton County!*

You can purchase a ticket by visiting <http://www.piggestraffle.com/> and selecting **Special Olympics Hamilton County.**

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