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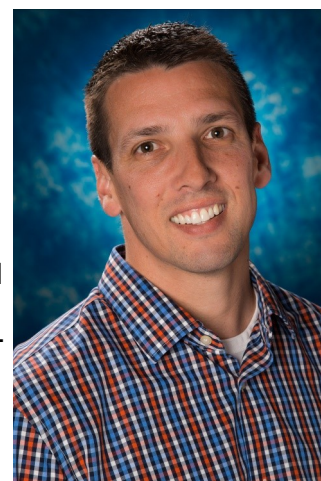
A Special Place

By Ben Melillo

One winter afternoon in 2005 I walked onto the swimming pool deck at Oak Hills High School, not knowing what to expect. That day forever changed my life.

I had always loved sports and saw that Special Olympics needed help. I swam and coached my whole life, so I decided to volunteer.

I wanted to help others. I wanted to give back. I wanted to do something more meaningful with my free time. What I quickly learned was that volunteering was benefiting me as much, or more than, any of the athletes. Our team was (and still is) full of amazingly spirited, funny, hard-working, genuine, and talented people of all ages. I couldn't wait for the next practice. I was hooked. I've been coaching ever since.



Ben Melillo

Over the years, I became friends with so many of the athletes. We've shared a lot of special moments at practices, meets and fundraisers. I've seen toddlers learn to swim, "first" dives and flip turns, leaky goggles, acceptance speeches, best times and gold medal relays. And sometimes the small, silly things - the quick interactions and stories on deck - are just as meaningful. There isn't a single practice where I don't leave in a better mood than when I arrived. And always with a smile on my face.

Each year, one of my favorite things to do is look back at pictures after our final swim meet. In my mind, I can hear the echoes bouncing off the walls of the natatorium. I can smell the chlorine from the pool. I can see the pride on the faces of the coaches and athletes as they show off their awards. I reminisce about the great times we had and the memories that will stay with us forever.

No matter who you are, Special Olympics teaches you something about swimming - and about life. We can't always win, but we can be brave in the attempt!

Ben Melillo
Coach, Vice President SOHC Advisory Committee





SOHC Keeps on Rollin'

Well, the times they are a-changing here at Special Olympics Hamilton County. This summer we bid a fond farewell to our Director of 32 years Janet Smith.

In addition to that, we are welcoming new Advisory Committee members and staff and are working with new partners in the community.

You can read about all this in this issue of the Torchbearer. So it's an exciting time to be a part of SOHC.

One thing that has not changed is the need for your support. We are still providing training, competition and fun to nearly 1,800 athletes across Hamilton County.

In order to help you, we have enclosed a handy donation envelope in the issue. So make sure you take advantage of it!

If you want to get involved on a more personal basis (through volunteering or serving on a committee), just let us know and we will find a place for you!

You can call 513-271-2606

Welcome to our New Advisory Committee Members!

Susan Kelley

Susan has more than 14 years of experience providing tax services. She specializes in the taxation of financial institutions, including community banks and insurance companies. Her experience includes corporate and pass-through entity tax compliance and planning as well as preparation and reporting of tax information.

She is a member of the American Institute of CPAs and The Ohio Society of Certified Public Accountants.

Susan is also a member of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati's Emerging Leaders and serves on the finance committees for Bethany House Services and Mercy McAuley High School.

Susan is a graduate of University of Dayton, Ohio, with a B.S. degree in accounting and management information systems.



Genna Lehman

Genna Lehman is a middle school math teacher at North College Hill City Schools.

After graduating from the University of Dayton with a Bachelors in Middle Childhood Education, Genna taught throughout Cincinnati. She received her Masters in Multicultural Special Education from Mt. St. Joseph University and used her ABA/VB experience to start a middle school classroom for students on the autism spectrum before returning to the general education classroom.

Genna enjoys training and racing triathlons and half marathons locally. Genna is married to Clint and has 2 kids, Carter (3) and Adelaide (1.5), who love joining mom and dad coaching the Special Olympics Swim Program at Oak Hills.



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Nicole White

Nicole is currently working at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center as a Research Shared Facilities Administrator. In her role at CCHMC, she is responsible for overseeing finance and operations for approximately thirty research facilities that offer various types of services assisting researchers in conducting experiments.

She earned her MBA with a focus on global management from Ashland University (Ashland, OH) in 2010 and her Bachelor of Science from The Evergreen State College (Olympia, WA) in 2002. Currently, she is working on a terminal degree in Leadership and Change Management from Antioch University (Yellow Springs, OH) and is interested in studying the phenomenon of collective leadership across pluralistic organizations.

As a former researcher and now administrator, Nicole also brings with her not only a strong sense of science, business, and operations but also her passion for running. She has been an avid runner her entire life and to date has completed over 27 Marathons and 4 ultra-distance races. She has been a volunteer coach for the Westside YAP program and believes fitness is for everyone. She hopes to one day run a marathon with her daughter, Kate who has Down syndrome. Nicole lives in Delhi with her husband, Joel, four children, Noah, Morgan, Adelaine, and Kate, as well as their dog, Kali, and newly adopted kitten, Dawn.



Volunteer Spotlight: Give Camp

One weekend this past October, an army of volunteers assembled in West Chester to complete major technical projects for area non-profits. Known as Southwest Ohio Give Camp, this group assigned a team to SOHC. This team, composed of half dozen or so developers and designers, rebuilt the entire SOHC website. For free. This was a task that normally would have taken weeks and cost an estimated \$17,000. But due to their commitment and willingness to forgo sleep, the team got it finished in less than three days.

"It was my great honor and privilege to make such a positive impact on such a wonderful organization," said Chris Strolia-Davis, Tech Leader for the project. "The whole team was thrilled to have a chance to work with the dedicated and caring folks from Special Olympics Hamilton County."

The Southwest Ohio Give Camp exists to lend technical resources to non-profits and charities that do not have them. It links up technology professionals with various organizations so they can get help to improve existing sites, build new sites or apps that allow them to reach out to their various communities.

This year was the 10th consecutive year this service was provided to non-profit organizations from all over southwest Ohio.

With the help of SOHC staff and input from the Advisory Board, the website was given a dramatic make over. You can see for yourself at www.specialolympics-hc.org.



Chris Strolia-Davis (far right) and the rest of the team at Southwest Ohio Give Camp

New Staff Member:

Biz Goslee



Biz Goslee graduated from Marquette University in 2016 with a major in Exercise Science and a minor in Psychology.

She participated in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Pennsylvania for one year after graduation, working at an Adult Day program and coaching at the University of the Scranton.

The past two years, she has been the assistant lacrosse coach at Marquette University.

Biz is excited to be back in her hometown of Cincinnati meeting the athletes and working with Special Olympics!



Soccer For All: SOHC and FCC team up!

Special Olympics has teamed up with Major League Soccer to start the Special Olympics Unified Soccer Exchange Program through MLS's Soccer For All campaign. This program allows Special Olympics Unified Soccer teams from all over the country to partner with their local MLS team, compete in matches against rival teams and experience the reality of Major League Soccer. Unified sports pairs Special Olympics athletes with typical peer partners to compete on the same team.

There are two components to the program: Unified Soccer Teams and the Unified All Star Game.

In July 2019, SOHC sealed their official partnership with FC Cincinnati (FCC) by sending the first SOHC athlete and Unified Partner to Orlando, Florida to represent FCC in the 2019 Unified All Star Game.

SOHC athlete Matt Grafe and partner Lindsay Bartsch spent four days in Orlando, training and competing with Team East. Chaperone and parent, Gary Grafe also attended.

"The experience was unreal and representing SOHC and FC Cincinnati together made it even more special," said Bartsch. "It is really cool to show the world what Special Olympics is all about."



Grafe and Bartsch with Columbus Crew counterparts



Grafe and Bartsch with MLS celebrity coaches Cobi Jones (L) and Oguchi Onyewu (R)

Before departure, Bartsch and Grafe attended a practice at the new FCC training facility in Milford, where FCC player Manu Ledesma was able to give Matt his personalized FC jersey to wear.

All Unified All Star pairs were then recognized on field before the MLS All Star Game that evening.

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Soccer for All (cont.)

Bartsch and Grafe spent one day in training with their team. The next day, they competed at ESPN Wide World of Sports in Orlando with their team and their celebrity MLS coach, Oguchi Onyewu. The pair was victorious in a 70 minute match vs. the West, winning 2-1.

"I had lot of fun playing and meeting the other players. I am now even Facebook friends with my roommate from Texas!"

The partnership and experience carried over once the pair returned home. Matt says that he "loves being friends with Manu because he will recognize me at games and come say hi."

When asked for his perspective as a father, Gary tells us that "it was special to see FCC and MLS treat my son with kindness and as an athlete. We were nervous about transitioning from a smaller game (6v6) that SOHC plays to a full size field. When the team got onto the field, they played without reservation."

The next step in this partnership is to put together a Unified team that will represent FC Cincinnati during Rivalry Week with Columbus Crew. The anticipated first match will be held in August 2020 at MAPFRE Stadium in Columbus, OH. Grafe tells us, "I truly cannot wait to see how unified soccer grows in the greater Cincinnati area. It helps athletes develop their confidence on and off the field."



Grafe with FCC player Manu Ledesma at August 2019 match

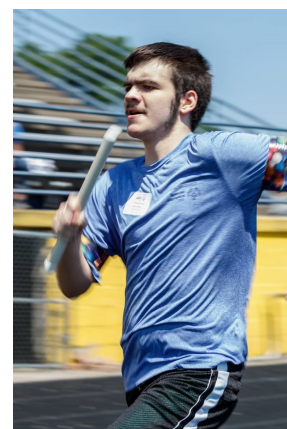
Foundation Spotlight: The Susan and Daniel Pfau Foundation

The Daniel and Susan Pfau Foundation, through the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, has been generously supporting Special Olympics Hamilton County since 2003. They have provided funding for the Unified Ski Club, Fall and Winter games and have been instrumental in giving SOHC the resources to send athletes to the Special Olympics World Games.

In October, 2019, the Foundation announced that they will be supporting SOHC with a multi-year grant of \$75,000 (\$15,000 over five years).

These funds will allow SOHC to expand its program capacity, reaching more athletes in a broader geographic swath of Hamilton County.

This will make a significant impact on the number of people in our community who will be able to enjoy the training, competition and comradery of Special Olympics!



Young Professionals Committee gettin' it together in 2020!

Our Young Professionals have lots of cool stuff coming up in 2020. More details to come but mark your calendars now so you can get involved too!

Jan. 5th—Spin class at CycleBar Rookwood

Jan. 29th—SOHC Night at Cincinnati Cyclones

Feb. 19th—Winter Games athlete send-off at Sorrento's

All of these events have a give-back component so you will not only have a great time, you will also be supporting Special Olympics!

For info on more events like this, make sure you join us on social media and keep an eye on your inbox!



Just like riding a bike...

The Cincinnati Cycling Club lends its support.



Keith Curran, Fred Ferguson and Bill Hobstetter had a vision. They wanted to combine their passion for cycling and their desire to support a worthy cause. After a few months of meetings emails and phone conversations, they came up with the Great Pumpkin Roll Ride. After further deliberation, teaming up with Special Olympics Hamilton County and their cycling program seemed like a natural fit.

On September 28, nearly 400 cyclists, including more than 30 SOHC athletes and family members set out on from the Blue Note in Harrison on a warm, early autumn ride. Riders chose from a variety of distances ranging from eight to 60 miles.

"I reached out to SOHC because I thought we should have a cycling fundraiser event," said Hobstetter. "I met with Alex Schneider from the SOHC Young Professional Committee and we came up with the idea to partner with the Cincinnati Cycle Club. I had the idea because Special Olympics has been an important part of my daughter Audrey's life, and I wanted to find a way to help give back."

This year's Great Pumpkin Roll Ride was by every measure a success.

"We just can't thank our riders, sponsors and SOHC enough," said Ferguson. "We raised nearly \$7,500 for the athletes and that's what is all about."

According to Curran, this will continue to be an annual event supporting the athletes and programs of SOHC.



Upcoming SOHC Fundraisers

Polar Plunge of Greater Cincinnati

On February 1, 2020, you can Jump into the Fun at Joe's Crab Shack in Bellevue, KYf or the 20th Annual Special Olympics Polar Plunge event...you won't regret it or forget it!

To sign up, go to:

www.greatercincinnatiplunge.com

1)Click "Join a team" 2) click Team Company 3) **choose Special Olympics Hamilton County**

Don't like the thought of jumping in cold water in February? You can be a "Chicken" and still raise money for Special Olympics.

Spread the word to get the

"Chill of a Lifetime!!"



Evening for Champions

Presented by Pep Productions
Saturday, March 28, 2020
Schiff Conference and Banquet Center
Xavier University

Cincinnati Corporate Olympics

Presented by Fifth Third Bank
Wednesday, July 8, 2020
Fountain Square, Cincinnati
Noon to 1:30

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.

If you are participating in any of the Flying Pigs events, you can also raise money online for SOHC! Just go to:
<http://flyingpigmarathon.com/> and get started!



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