

Hamilton County



The Torchbearer



CAN'T KEEP US DOWN!

Through rain, clouds, or even a pandemic, you can't stop Special Olympics Hamilton County athletes and their eagerness to be back on the playing field.

Our athletes and volunteers have been super stars at our weekly walking clubs, outdoor fitness with Anna's Barrier Free Bootcamp, or even lacing up their shoes for the Zoomin' Virtually Race!

In this issue of the Torchbearer, you will be able to take a look back on 2020 through the lens of SOHC. From in person programs to virtual art sessions, this year has thrown some unique challenges our way. One thing has remained constant: our athlete's drive to participate and the generosity from our donors.

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SOHC WELCOMES NEW ADVISORY
COMMITTEE MEMBER

Over the past 20 years, James has driven large-scale transformation efforts in multiple Fortune 500 companies. Currently, he is a Sr. Process Optimization Manager at Fifth Third Bank. Before 5/3 Bank, James led process improvement efforts at Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Xerox. He has delivered multi-million dollar impacts across his entire career by improving back-office processes, implementing go-to-market strategies, and transforming data/source system architectures.

In addition to his professional experience, James holds several finance & process excellence certifications and an MBA from the University of Kentucky.

A few words from James:
"I am thrilled to join a team so integral to enabling so many athletes to excel. I am a learner will apologize in advance if I ask too many questions of you. My initial desire is understanding what has made the SOHC group so successful in the past. On a personal note, I am married with two young daughters. I love to play golf, exercise, and read business books in my free time."

Welcome James!



COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:
ST. XAVIER HIGH SCHOOL

St. Xavier High School has always been a fan of SOHC. The students of St. Xavier have assisted with many programs, including our bowling program at Stones Lanes, sport practices, Young Athletes Program and more!

With the challenges that COVID has brought in programming, St. Xavier accepted the challenge to host SOHC athletes during the weeks of September and October for Recreational Nights. This weekly program provided an opportunity that the athletes needed and wanted. They were able to connect with their friends, meet new friends and engage with the St. X students. The St. X volunteers were so generous to give our athletes their time every week and jump into each activity with them!

Thank you to St. Xavier High School for partnering with us during this time to provide an opportunity for our athletes! We hope to continue this relationship, providing a variety of programs for the volunteers and athletes to connect!

"Every week when the athletes show their competitive sides and relationships, it motivates me to do more and have better relationships. Even though they might not be the best at athletics, they still try the best they can. They push each other and that motivates me. I've learned that no matter what you do, you can always help someone in a positive way, even if it is small. At Special Olympics, we do not treat athletes different."

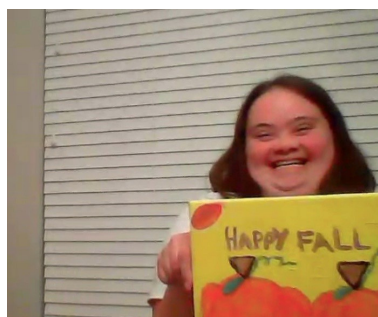
- Jack Metzger, St. Xavier High School Student

MORE THAN SPORTS: SOHC ATHLETES SHOWCASE

CREATIVE TALENTS

As they say, creativity takes courage. Our athletes and volunteers have been nothing but courageous during our pandemic programming. Check out these fun and interactive programs our athletes have enjoyed!

Jess, a volunteer coming to us from Christ School of Nursing, stepped up to provide a creative weekly activity for SOHC! Jess uses her own artistic talents to safely engage our athletes in seasonal craft making sessions. We were able to provide 20 kits with all the supplies needed for a five week program thanks to funding from the Daniel and Susan Pfau Foundation. SOHC athletes love to meet new volunteers, see their friends (virtually), and challenge themselves to learn something new! Now our athletes will be able to display their crafts for the upcoming holiday seasons. Thank you, Jess!



Mt. Notre Dame volunteer, Nadia Bingham, has given our athletes the opportunity to express their creativity with her **Paint Us Gold Art Series**. This program was held at Bemmes Park on Saturdays in September and October.

Each week the athletes were given a blank canvas and a painting goal or idea to work towards. Nadia and volunteers encouraged originality in their canvas designs. Athletes were creative and patient with their masterpieces. Thank you, Nadia!

SOHC ATHLETE'S ROAD TO OLYMPIC GLORY

BY JIM O'CONNELL

The uncertain times in which we are currently living have had an effect on everything we do. For Special Olympics – Hamilton County, this has led to cancelled in-person training and competitions. This is a sad situation for all of us. However, a light in the darkness has appeared with the publishing of a book by Hamilton County athlete David Tripathy.

Called “My Road to Olympic Glory”, it tells the story of David’s road in Special Olympics, culminating with his competing for Team Ohio in swimming at the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games in Seattle, WA. David was able to win 3 medals during the competition and was thrilled to be a part of this.

However, the real story is actually the fact that David’s road to glory began in 2009, when he began swim lessons at the local YMCA with his teacher Angie. While swimming was a relatively new skill for David, his lessons with Angie progressed from doing the dog paddle stroke to learning breaststroke, backstroke, butterfly and freestyle. David participated in the local Special Olympics swimming meet that year and won 3 medals. David’s efforts showed that by competing successfully, his self-esteem grew immeasurably. As a result, his swimming efforts have led to participation in other sports like tennis and basketball. He also helps mentor younger swimmers, especially serving as someone they could look up to. David says watching his hero Michael Phelps in his past Olympics triumphs gave him confidence to succeed.

It’s helped that his parents, Basil & Dede Rowe, have encouraged and supported him in his journey, proving that all of us have stake in the participation and performance of our athletes. It really does take a village and David has shown what can happen when all of the elements of success come together.

David’s book is available at [Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com) and is a worthwhile read for all of us.

Thank you, David, for showing the way!



SOHC AND CLUB MMA FIGHT FOR INCLUSION

BY NICOLE WHITE



Special Olympics Hamilton County recently partnered with Club MMA in Green Township to develop a recreational program for athletes younger than our competitive age range of 8 years old. The partnership formed out of the urge for more variety in programming for athletes in this age range.

This venture was approached as a 6-week pilot program comprised of five participants ages 4-7. Though martial arts is not a sanctioned sport with Special Olympics, it is a sport that can aid in the development of self-discipline, strength, integrity, and focus. Many individuals can participate in martial arts activities regardless of their abilities.

Jeff Robison, the owner of Club MMA, hosted programming over virtual platforms due to COVID this past summer for individuals with Down syndrome, trains veterans who have lost a limb during the war, and provides instruction for all sizes, abilities, and ethnicities in his studio. Jeff's passion for empowering individuals through his teaching of martial arts shines through in the way he was not afraid to take on this first-time pilot program that was met with much success for our younger athletes.

This partnership will enable other coaches with athletes in this age range to develop new ideas and skills to pass on to their own classes within the community around Cincinnati. Though a paid course may continue with Club MMA for individuals with disabilities, creating a venture where we could leverage his expertise to help us to understand how MMA can be fun, engaging, and developmental for younger athletes provided us with some new ideas for the young athletes programming we can develop around Cincinnati.

"It's important to create opportunities and programming for kids with disabilities to have the same level of introduction into athletics as other typically developing kids. As a parent, it is hard to find inclusive programming in the community and YAP helps to fill that void for kids who just want to have the same opportunities as their peers."

- Nicole White, Parent



Participants of this program were active in the SOHC Young Athletes Program (YAP). YAP is a curriculum designed for athletes ages 2-7. To find out more visit specialolympics-hc.org.

DEVELOPMENT DOWNLOAD

This year has been filled with endless uncertainty and a lot of change. It's no secret that many nonprofit organizations across the country have been hit hard due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Special Olympics Hamilton County is no different. Many of our fundraising events were canceled, postponed, or reimagined, but more importantly our athletes, teams, and coaches, had to take a step back from practices, games, and competitions.

And while this year has been filled with so much insecurity and so many adjustments, this year has also been filled with hope. We saw our community step up for the Special Olympics Hamilton County athletes. Coaches rearranged practices to be socially distant or online, volunteers stepped up and worked tirelessly and quickly to transform fundraisers, and athletes adapted to the new, much-abridged programming.

It seems impossible to think that the year 2020 is coming to an end. During this giving season, please consider giving to your local Special Olympics programs. Your donations allow us to continue providing more than 20 top-tier sports and recreational programs all year long for athletes at no cost. Special Olympics Hamilton County serves more than 1,500 athletes.

But for every person with intellectual disabilities just in Hamilton County there are nearly 100 on the sideline waiting for a chance to play. Today you can give athletes the chance to get in the game once this public health crisis passes. Donate today to show your support for Special Olympics Hamilton County by sending back the enclosed envelope or by visiting **www.givesohc.org**.

Right now, locally and across the country, Special Olympics athletes are just waiting to return to their much-loved competitions and trainings. When that day comes, we will be so ready for them. For now, we will continue thinking creatively, adjusting to new normal, and cheering on our athletes from a distance.

Hope you and yours are staying safe and healthy during this holiday season.

All the best,

Jackie Oney
Director of Development



SOHC athlete, Chase Doppler, zoomin' outside during the Zoomin' Virtual Race this year.

2020: YEAR IN REVIEW

FUNDRAISING EVENTS REIMAGINED

Special Olympics Hamilton County staff and volunteers worked quickly to transform the spring gala to an interactive, virtual fundraising event just weeks after COVID-19 shut down many parts of the U.S. While the event looked nothing like what we had originally planned, SOHC volunteers, donors, advocates and sponsors showed up to support their local Special Olympics athletes raising over \$30,000!



With the help of our amazing SOHC volunteers and supporters, the Tee it Up for Special Olympics golf outing still happened this September. Rules and regulations were put into place with everyone's health and safety in mind. Over \$20,000 was raised for Special Olympics Hamilton County athletes and programs!



WHAT'S NEXT?

Special Olympics 2021 Polar Plunge: Plunge My Way!



While we won't be plunging in-person this year, we hope you'll still join us in plunging for Special Olympics Hamilton County! Join our team, Hamilton County Freezecats, and learn more at classy.org/team/329331

Registration is open now, and we encourage you to plunge with us from home during the month of February.

SOHC WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

SOHC is excited to welcome Jackie Oney to the team. Jackie will be serving as the Director of Development for Hamilton County and the Southwest Region of Ohio.

Jackie comes to SOHC from JDRF Southwest Ohio with a background in development and marketing. She's a University of Cincinnati Lindner College of Business graduate. But, she's also a current student as she's working towards her MBA part-time as well.

Outside of work, you can find Jackie at any Cincinnati sports games, but if she had to choose a favorite she would pick Bearcat basketball or FCC soccer games. She also loves to spend time with her fiancé, Bernie, and their dog, Messi.

Welcome Jackie!



HEALTH AND WELLNESS THRIVING WITH ANNA'S BARRIER FREE BOOTCAMP

"I created Anna's Barrier Free Bootcamp with the mission to welcome the community and families of individuals with special needs to work towards maintaining a healthy lifestyle through fitness, movement, social interactions, and fun! "

- Anna Hall, Anna's Barrier Free Bootcamp



Special Olympics is an organization that pushes our athletes to be the best version of themselves on and off the playing field. One area that SOHC is working to develop is our health and wellness offerings to our athletes.

In 2019, we teamed up with Anna Hall, certified personal trainer. Anna began holding independent boot camp classes at Blue Ash Recreation Center. We partnered with her to invite our athletes. This program flourished to what is known now as **Anna's Barrier Free Bootcamp**.

When athletes attend the boot camp sessions, they are pushed to try new things and expected to give it their all. What is the best about Anna's Barrier Free Bootcamp is that it is a welcoming community for individuals to genuinely better themselves, no matter the level.

SOHC has noticed the positive change our athlete's mindset towards health and wellness, and Anna is a huge part of this change. We have seen athletes with physical transformations of weight by working with Anna during her boot camp and personal training sessions.

Anna's program is not all about working out, it's also about fun! We joined her for a day of socially distanced kickball on October 17th.

"I love working out with Anna because she makes working out fun!"

- Lauren Froh



SPORTS DURING COVID

Like everyone across the globe during this time, SOHC had to get creative this summer and fall to be able to provide sports for our athletes. We did many things virtual and in person to make sure there was a chance for our athletes to get involved! We were able to have in person pick up practices, small leagues or one day events for Unified Golf, Flag Football, Soccer, Softball, Gymnastics, Powerlifting, and Cycling. We also had four walking groups, art, and recreational nights in person.

We could not have planned these events without our steadfast volunteers. Thank you to our coaches and volunteers that have assisted to practice with our athletes during this time. They have made the extra effort to ensure a safe practice environment as well as an opportunity to our athletes who want and need Special Olympics in their lives.



SOHC TEACHERS THIS FALL

SOHC wants to thank all of our teachers across Hamilton County for making an effort to continue Special Olympics activities with their students during this time. In March, we ceased all our in-person school day events, but that didn't stop our teachers and students! The highlight this fall with our students and teachers was our virtual walk/run called **Zoomin' Virtually!** MND Senior, Leah Martin, organized this virtual race as her Senior Capstone Project. We had almost 70 students participate and almost 100 total Hamilton County Athletes zoomin'. Harrison and Heidt Center schools even set up race courses and finish lines. Check out our *Teacher's Corner* page on our website to stay updated!



MEMORIES THAT LAST!

We have been without our normal programming for almost 10 months. SOHC athletes sure do miss every part: the exercise, friendships, coaches, competition, and the routine of it all! We want to joyfully remind you that there are so many memories at SOHC that we are all holding onto right now!

The SOHC Warriors basketball team had its inaugural season in 2019-20, led by first time SOHC coach, Craig Thomas. When Coach Craig was asked about his first season, he recalled his favorite memory.



My favorite memory is watching the Warriors come together...from a group of individuals who were on a waiting list to a team that cared so much about each other. I can't wait until we can all do that again. I know the Warriors will be ready!"

-Craig Thomas, SOHC Warriors Head Coach

SPRING FOR HOPE

The safety and health of our athletes is our number one priority. As we look towards the future we can hope together. We can hope for creative and flexible solutions for Winter sport opportunities. We can also hope for warm weather to pick up our Spring season sports. Joanne Krekeler is involved in multiple sports with SOHC. She hopes to return to the routine of getting back into sports and practices, see her friends, and be with each other without worrying about COVID. She explains it is hard right now, not doing sports and not being with her friends, but Joanne is hoping when spring comes around we are able to get back on the court or softball field for more exercise and enjoy each others company. She mentions now is the time to remember all the good memories. For now, using Zoom is a different way to see each other. "Just because it is different doesn't mean it's bad, just different!" Joanne exclaims. We hope to see Joanne and other SOHC athletes back on the courts and fields soon!



HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND THANK YOU FROM SOHC
FROM LINDSAY BARTSCH & BIZ GOSLEE

In the midst of chaos, we wanted to take a moment to thank everyone that has remained steadfast in their support of SOHC this year:

- Thank you to our donors** whose generous and courageous gifts, we have been able to engage virtually with our athletes over the last 9 months.
- Thank you to our facilities** that have let us practice, meet and play. Your willingness to partner has given our athletes the ability to achieve and succeed.
- Thank you to our coaches and volunteers** for being the engine behind the machine that make it all possible. Your countless hours of planning, attending and support to our athletes does not go unnoticed.
- Thank you to our parents** for being so dedicated to your athlete by picking up supplies, driving to trainings and now, helping your athlete in our virtual world. Thank you for being a guiding light for your athlete and SOHC.
- And finally, Thank you to our athletes** for being the true champions of Special Olympics Hamilton County. You are what truly make this all possible. Thank you for continuing to believe in yourself and SOHC to show what it truly means to be "Brave in the Attempt", no matter what life throws your way.

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★ Postcard for Athletes - Return to SOHC ★

Please tear off postcard and mail back to SOHC.

During COVID much of the world and SOHC have used more virtual platforms and communications. SOHC would like to send you non-web based resources to use at home. The following resources will be mailed to you to use whenever you want!

Please select **TWO options** to be sent to you. If you need any more resources feel free to reach out to SOHC office, we are here for you during this time!

- **Fit 5 Exercises** (Strength, Endurance & Flexibility)
- **Fit 5 Guide** (Intro guide to SO Fit 5 & tracker)
- **Stretching Guide** (muscle, sport and/or job specific)
- **Strong Minds Exercises** (Mental Health)

Please give us your email address to receive SOHC communications:

**If interested in web-based resources, please visit our website for the Resource Guide*