



## ***A Big Year For Me***

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Smith, Delaware County Athlete Leader



Hi! My name is Elizabeth Smith, however my friends and family also call me Lizzie. This past summer, I was one of the 50 lucky athletes that were part of Team PA in the USA games last summer. I was part of the 7 member swim team. From beginning to end, the trip to USA Games was AWESOME and it is an experience I will never forget.

The send-off at Xfinity Live set the stage for the fantastic experience to follow. We had brunch with our families and got psyched up for our trip with the help of Swoop and some Eagles cheerleaders! After the festivities, Wawa employees cheered us as we boarded the buses and we

then had a police escort down I-95 to the airport!

The flight to Seattle was very long (and we had a 5 hour delay at the Charlotte airport) but it was worth all the trouble because Seattle was FANTASTIC!

Opening Ceremonies at Husky Stadium at the University of Washington were nothing short of SPECTACULAR! It was really exciting to parade into the stadium filled with thousands of athletes, families and friends! There was a choir of 2018 voices, celebrities, bands, Native American dancers, and of course the lighting of the amazing torch!

We stayed in a dorm on the University of Washington campus. I was excited to be rooming with my friend, Elizabeth Porter. All of our competitions were scattered throughout the area. The swimming venue was 30 miles away from the University in the world-class Kings County Aquatics Center. It was the biggest and most beautiful pool that I have ever seen! Our GREAT coaches, Stacy Banyas and Fred Knauss, were very busy keeping our team organized and making sure that we got to staging at the right times! Everything at the swimming venue ran very smoothly. With the best athletes from around the country in each division swimming, the competition was fierce! In the end, I won two ribbons and two medals.

Overall, Team PA won over 50 medals and ribbons. The medals were beautiful, huge, and heavy. While it is always fun to win medals, it was the experience of just being in this electric atmosphere that was so special! I loved meeting athletes and coaches from all over the country, seeing some really clever tee shirts (Wisconsin cows were the best!) and seeing the families and friends supporting the athletes. Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, we had purple PA pins to trade with people from all over the US. It was fun to meet new people while trading! ESPN was there filming every day. The best of all was that the medal ceremonies were held on a floating dock in the diving pool!

During the week there were lots of activities including a 4th of July picnic, Olympic Village and a Mariners baseball game. Our schedule for seven swimmers was pretty hectic, but our coaches arranged for us to participate in as many things as possible. My whole family came from PA, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco so we spent a day sightseeing in Seattle. We went to the

famous Pike Place Market, the space needle that is the symbol of Seattle, and the pier. We had lunch at the Hard Rock Café ... one of my favorite places because I have a collection of "guitar" pins from all over the world!

We returned to Philadelphia excited and exhausted, with enough memories to last a lifetime! I would like to thank SOPA for giving me this unique experience to travel, meet new friends, and have such a good time with my teammates!!!!

Shortly after returning home from Seattle, I got an e-mail from Athlete Leadership Coordinator, Jordan Schubert about a new ambassador program through PECO. SOPA was chosen to be one of the first organizations to benefit from this new program. As a result of my many years as an Athlete Leader, I was selected as SOPA's representative! As their representative, I was trained at the PECO headquarters in Philadelphia so that I know all about PECO services and ways to save energy. Now I am prepared to get to work!

Every month I am given a list of events where PECO will be setting up a tent or a table to distribute information, answer questions, and give away free items like hats, magnets, hand sanitizer etc. I am required to assist at a minimum of 12 events. PECO provided a stipend to SOPA through which I could have been paid for my time. However, my family and I have decided that this was an excellent chance for me to give something back to SOPA for all the wonderful experiences that they have provided for me as an athlete and Athlete Leader over the past 30 years! So, I am a volunteer Energy Force Ambassador, working to support SOPA!

These experiences show some of the many things you can accomplish in Special Olympics if you work hard towards it. I am thankful for everything Special Olympics has given me and will continue to give for many years to come.

*Elizabeth "Lizzie" Smith is an Athlete Leader from Delaware County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 30 years. In addition to being one of 50 athletes from PA that competed at the 2018 USA Games, Lizzie also was a member of Team USA during the 1999 World Games in North Carolina.*

## ***My First Fall Festival Experience***

Lisa Heath, Crawford County Athlete



My name is Lisa Heath and I am an athlete from Crawford County. I am 28 years old and have been participating in Special Olympics for half my life and have enjoyed every moment of it! I love making new friends. Some of the sports I've competed in are track, bowling basketball and volleyball.

While I've been playing volleyball for three years now, my team had not been to Fall Festival at Villanova until this past year. I had heard from other athletes how great an experience it was, but I was blown away when I first arrived! Following a long bus ride from Meadville and full day of prelims on Friday, it was time for Opening Ceremonies at the newly renovated Pavilion. A big highlight for me was getting to hold my county's banner as all the delegations were being introduced.

On Saturday morning, I was a bit nervous. However, with each game, I got more comfortable and excited. In the end, we wound up taking home the bronze medal. I want to thank my coaches Brian and Barb for all their support and cheering me.

Now that I have crossed off Fall Festival on my Special Olympics bucket list, I'd like to give swimming, bocce and floor hockey a try! I'm also hoping to attend Athlete Leadership University and learn new skills to take on new opportunities outside of sports.

*Lisa Heath is an athlete from Crawford County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 14 years. In addition to accomplishing her sports goals, Lisa is also interested in becoming an Athlete Representative for Crawford County.*

## ***Going Above and Beyond***

Bobbi Jo Rhen, Lebanon County Athlete Leader



Hi everyone. My name is Bobbi Jo Rhen from Lebanon County. In 2015, I was excited when my Manager chose me to be trained as an Athlete Representative for Lebanon County. During that time, I got to attend Athlete Congress, become the Chair of Lebanon County's Athlete Leadership Team and teach other athletes on how to become Athlete Representatives at Athlete Leadership University.

As a result of my hard work, I graduated from Athlete Leadership University with a degree in governance in 2017. While I was proud of all the work I did to earn that degree, I also wanted to do more as an Athlete Leader. I decided to also become a Global Messenger, where I could spread the word on how Special Olympics has made a positive impact on me, as well as a soccer skills coach to share my love and knowledge of sports with my fellow athletes. These new skills have led to some pretty incredible opportunities for me!

This past spring, I was Co-emcee at the State Figure Skating competition in York Pa. at the York Ice Area. This was my first time speaking in front of a large audience, and while I was nervous at first, I really enjoyed it!

Getting selected to speak at Opening Ceremonies for larger events like Summer Games and Fall Festival takes a lot of hard work and patience. Special Olympics Pennsylvania has over 100 Global Messengers throughout the state and that number is increasing each year. To give the best Global Messengers an equal opportunity to be selected, 2-3 are chosen to audition for the event. Even though the audition is over the phone, my friend Jordan, who is also the Athlete Leadership Coordinator, tries to make it as close to the actual ceremony as possible. When I received the script, I didn't waste any time preparing and took the audition as seriously as possible.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> at Summer Games at Penn State University I was the Co-emcee at Opening Ceremonies! Everyone was really enthusiastic and there was a lot of energy from the crowd. That was such a great experience for me, which also motivated me further to compete! In tennis, I won silver in singles and gold in doubles! After Summer Games concluded, I was chosen as the 2nd alternate for the 2019 World Games at Abu Dhabi.

This past fall I was athlete as coach for Lebanon county Soccer skills for the first time. It felt so great to help other. In 2019, I will be receiving my 2<sup>nd</sup> Athlete Leadership University diploma for completing my Athletes as Coaches practicum. I am also working on my Global Messenger II practicum and if I get that done I will then have three diplomas! One thing that I have learned through Special Olympics is to never give up your dreams.

*Bobbi Jo Rhen is an Athlete Leader from Lebanon County and has been participating in Special Olympics for 28 years. Bobbi Jo is also a member of the Indoor Winter Games Committee and will be a two time Athlete Leadership University graduate this fall.*

## ***Tomorrow Always Starts Today***

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator



Many of you may know that last Summer in Chicago, Special Olympics celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It's always amazing to realize that Special Olympics started as just a day camp in Eunice Kennedy Shriver's back yard and has evolved into a year round sports organization in over 170 countries around the world. In 2020, Special Olympics Pennsylvania will also be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Let's take a look at some of the major accomplishments of the global Special Olympics movement from 1968 to the end of 2018:

- 1968-The first Special Olympics games were hosted at Soldier Field in Chicago.
- 1970s-Special Olympics quickly grew throughout the US the following decade.
- 1980s-Special Olympics began growing in other countries around the world.
- 1989-Athlete Leadership was officially established, starting with the Athletes for Outreach program (now known as Global Messenger).
- 1990s-Special Olympics began a push for more inclusive health and sports programming through Healthy Athletes and Unified Sports.
- 1993-The first World Games outside the US took place in Austria.
- 2000-The first Global Athlete Congress took place in the Netherlands. Additional Global Athlete Congresses would then follow in 2005, 2010 and 2018.
- 2006-The first USA Games took place in Iowa and has taken place every four years since.
- 2008-Project UNIFY (now known as Unified Champion Schools) was created by Special Olympics to promote more inclusion and respect in the classroom and on the playing field.
- 2009-In a joint effort with Best Buddies, the Spread the Word campaign began to eliminate the "R-Word" from people's vocabulary.
- 2017-In preparation for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary both globally and locally, every Special Olympics program launched a campaign to raise more public awareness and greater recognition of major donors.
- 2018-In conjunction with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, Special Olympics International hosted the first ever Global Unified Soccer Cup in Chicago.

Those are just a few of the major highlights that have happened in the last 50 years. What's great about all of these is that every single one of them had the athletes as the main focus. I was born in 1993; 25 years after Special Olympics began. This is now my 15<sup>th</sup> year of participating in Special Olympics, meaning 60% of my life has been focused towards participating in and working for the organization that has given me so much. Each year, that number will go up, just as it has for many other athletes.

As we move forward into the next 50 years, I've spent a lot of time thinking of things Special Olympics programs around the world should focus on. It's never too early to begin thinking about the future.

1. **Every Special Olympics program has an athlete serving in a meaningful staff role**-This does not have to be exclusive to just Athlete Leadership. While every Special Olympics program does a great job keeping their athletes interests in mind, why wouldn't you want someone that's both an employee and consumer of the organization? Could you imagine what it would be like if no one at the Coca Cola Company tasted their own product? With the right training and support from other staff, this can be done!
2. **Every athlete has equal access to the best sports opportunities in their area**-Special Olympics Pennsylvania is actually going through this process as we speak. Over the next 5 years, local programs will be merged together to form 9 regions. Through these regional programs, there will be more staff support and more resources available to give athletes the best training and competition opportunities in each sport offered. Special Olympics Pennsylvania actually adopted this idea from some other states that have been successful in this model, which could create a chain reaction to motivate other states to do the same!
3. **More athletes have equal opportunities to be trained and placed into meaningful leadership roles**-One of my personal goals is to try to get information on Athlete Leadership into the hands of more athletes, coaches and families. Right now, I have a limited number of athlete e-mail addresses available to me. While Facebook has helped a little, it still hasn't gotten out to the greater masses. One thing I've challenged our current Athlete Leaders with since the end of last year has been getting the word out to more athletes beyond their immediate circle. You can help me too by filling out a interest form that I'll be including in the "Important Announcements" section at the end! Additionally, it's one thing for an Athlete Leader to be trained. It's ultimately the responsibility of their program, both at the local and state level, to appropriately utilize them in capacities that best suit their skills and interest. In 2028 for Special Olympics' 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I'd like to see Special Olympics International ask programs to nominate Athlete Leaders to serve in capacities where they can excel!
4. **Improved utilization of nearby non-competing athletes for USA and World Games**-One thing I'm really proud of is that here in Pennsylvania, we have athletes asking how they can still be a part of events they're not competing in. This kind of goes back to my last point a little bit. Whether it's for event evaluations, media engagement, partnership outreach, etc., it's important that we get some of our most talented Athlete Leaders off the sidelines and into the game outside of the game. Special Olympics Florida is another state that's very strong with Athlete Leadership. In fact, a lot of what I learned about Athlete Leadership, I actually learned from them. With the next USA Games taking place in Orlando in 2022, I have no doubt that they will give as many of their athletes a meaningful opportunity that it might be difficult to give a competing athlete, or an athlete that's not from the area. If Pennsylvania ever gets to host USA Games or any other major event, no doubt I will be looking for non-competing athletes to get more engagement throughout the community!

5. **Adaptive Unified Sports programming**-While it may sound crazy, there is a way that we can make Unified Sports even more inclusive. Imagine how many athletes there are that want to participate in a sport, but can't because of a physical impairment. Imagine a basketball game where everyone is in a wheelchair or a bocce match where everyone is blindfolded. One of the concerns most athletes and coaches have about Unified Sports is of the partners dominating the competition, especially when Traditional and Unified teams are competing together. Those concerns essentially would disappear as everyone is required to play without a part of their body that may give them an advantage. Cool fact, I actually brought this up at a conference where Tim Shriver was in the room. I could see everyone in the room look at me except for him, however, I saw him writing something down. I wouldn't be surprised one bit if that was what he was writing!

Those are just five things I thought of while eating lunch one day. One thing we have in 2019 that we didn't have in 1968 is a more inclusive society. Each year, more people with intellectual disabilities are able to receive a proper education, which leads towards better training to find meaningful employment. In fact, most people with intellectual disabilities are more likely to find and maintain meaningful employment if they are also Special Olympics athletes.

In addition to the re-organization we are going through, Special Olympics Pennsylvania will also begin a new Strategic Plan in 2021. Throughout the next couple years, I want each of you to think about what's important to you as an athlete and how it can be improved to benefit more athletes. For those of you that read SOAR on a consistent basis, you may remember last year I talked about the importance of taking the opportunity to share directly with Special Olympics Pennsylvania your thoughts on the overall state of the organization.

The last 50 years of Special Olympics happened because one woman was willing to think and act outside the box and wasn't afraid of failure. Every time Mrs. Shriver accomplished something, she wasn't satisfied with doing good enough; she always asked herself and others what could be done better. If you thought my last idea on Adaptive Unified Sports was silly, imagine all the ideas she thought of that probably never even saw the light of day. If other people didn't also work with Mrs. Shriver and guide her, some of the things I mentioned in the beginning might not have happened.

The reason I shared these five thoughts with you is not just to make my job easier. I like being challenged by my fellow athletes. The best leaders don't just come up with their own ideas; they also listen to the thoughts of others. On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2068, I hope to be at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration where the main focus of the ceremony will be on the bigger and better athlete opportunities that evolved in the last 50 years. Even more importantly, I hope to turn to my grandkids and say to them, "We did something pretty remarkable; however we're not done yet. It's up to you and the generations to come to make Special Olympics even better in the next century."

The only way we can make the next 50 years of Special Olympics better is if we work together. Tomorrow always starts today!

*Jordan Schubert is the Athlete Leadership Coordinator for Special Olympics Pennsylvania and has been participating in Special Olympics for 15 years. Jordan is a proud graduate of West Chester University and was named a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Global Messenger by Special Olympics International in 2018.*

## **2018 Fall Festival Athlete Input Survey Results**

Grading System: Percentage of answers selected as "Excellent" plus one half percentage of answers selected as "Average" divided by X (Total # of graded questions) = Grade  
Example: 80% Excellent + 20% Average ÷ 2 = 90%

### **111 Surveys Completed Athlete Input Council: Approximately 40 Athletes Attended**

#### **Survey Breakdown by Sport:**

- Bocce: 33 (30%)
- LDR/LDW: 18 (16%)
- Power Lifting: 3 (3%)
- Roller Skating Speed: 1 (1%)
- Soccer 5 v 5: 5 (5%)
- Soccer 7 v 7: 6 (12%)
- Soccer Skills: 4 (4%)
- Volleyball: 40 (36%)
- Volleyball Skills: 1 (1%)

#### **First Time vs. Returning Athlete:**

- First Time: 18 (16%)
- Returning: 93 (84%)

#### **Grades:**

- Experience compared to previous years:
  - 87% Better + 9% Same ÷ 2 = 92% (A-)
    - 4 athletes answered "Needs Improvement"
      - Have 2 tents for awards at LDR/LDW
      - Allow athletes to utilize locker rooms at Nevin (Volleyball).
- Overall quality of competition:
  - 89% Excellent + 11% Average ÷ 2 = 95% (A)
- Food and beverages:
  - 74% Excellent + 23% Average ÷ 2 = 86% (B)
    - 3 athletes answered "Poor"
      - Burgers were undercooked.
      - Dining staff was very accommodating with my food allergies.
      - Need more dessert options at dinner.
      - Have healthier options instead of hot dogs, burgers and pizza.
- Opening Ceremonies:
  - 95% Excellent + 5% Average ÷ 2 = 98% (A)
    - 1 athlete answered "Poor"
      - Better assigned seating for athletes with mobility issues.
    - 2 athletes did not attend.
- Olympic Village:
  - 86% Excellent + 10% Average ÷ 2 = 91% (A-)
    - 3 athletes answered "Poor"
    - 25 athletes did not attend

#### **Overall Grade:**

- 93% (A)

#### **Additional Comments:**

- Officiating was much better (Volleyball).

- Officiating was not consistent (Soccer 5 v 5 and 7 v 7).
- Make next year's theme a carnival!
- Villanova students were great!
- LPHs did not spend as much time with us at competition (Bocce).
- Basketball exhibition during Opening Ceremonies was great. Additionally:
  - Rotate counties participating in the exhibition to give more athletes the opportunity.
  - Make exhibition co-ed.
  - Have basketball team more involved throughout the weekend.
- Love the new Pavilion and party like atmosphere.
- More portapotties on course for LDR/LDW.
- Shuttles were very slow to West Campus on Friday.
- Bocce was organized much better than in previous years.
- Coaches did not know who was assigned to what division (soccer skills).
- Better signage in cafeteria to encourage athletes to drink more water and/or sports drinks.
- Enjoyed the different fruit and vegetable options.
- Healthy Athletes was too spread out, hard to find everything.

*Thanks to everyone that completed an Athlete Input Survey and attended the Athlete Input Council at the 2018 Fall Festival! Athlete Input Councils are hosted at all four State Competitions and Athlete Input Surveys are conducted at all State Competitions, Spring and Fall Sectionals. If you unable to attend the Athlete Input Council or complete an Athlete Input Survey at an event, you are always welcome to share your feedback with Senior Competition Director, Gina Reid at [greid@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:greid@specialolympicspa.org).*

### ***Athlete Recognition***

SOAR would like to congratulate SOPA Athlete Leader and Board Member, Ernie Roundtree on being selected to run in the Boston Marathon in April!



## **Important Notices**

Jordan Schubert, Athlete Leadership Coordinator

### **Athlete Leadership University Updates:**

Registration is open for the Athlete Leadership University session taking place March 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> at the Sheetz Operations Center in Claysburg, PA (near Altoona). At this session, we will be offering Athlete Representative I and Global Messenger I. You can find more information [here](#). If interested in attending, please speak with your Local Program Manager/Director. Once they approve, please review the following instructions for registration:

- Starting this year, each athlete and mentor will be asked to submit their own registration form. Additionally, registration will be done through VSys Live, [Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Online Volunteer Portal](#)!
- Please use your email address as your User ID. If you have forgotten your User ID, please contact [vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:vsyshelp@specialolympicspa.org).
- If you are a new user to Special Olympics Pennsylvania's Online Volunteer Portal OR have forgotten your password, please click "Forgot Password?" A new password will be emailed to your email address (User ID) immediately following.
- Once logged in, please click on the "Athlete Leadership Opportunities" tab and complete for "March 2019."

Other Athlete Leadership University Sessions taking place in 2019:

- June 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>: Healthy Lifestyles and Athletes as Coaches at the Sheetz Operations Center in Claysburg, PA.
- August 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>: Athlete Representative I and Global Messenger I at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College, PA.
  - Please note that while this session takes place prior to the start of Leadership Conference, it is a separate registration.

### **New Online Athlete Leadership Forms**

- [Athlete Leadership University Interest Form](#)
- [Athlete Leadership University Practicum Report Forms](#)

### **Athlete Leadership Team Reminder:**

**All Athlete Leadership Teams (ALTs) are required to submit their minutes to me following each meeting. Minutes can be sent via:**

- E-mail: [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org)  
OR
- Mail: Attn: Jordan Schubert, 2570 Blvd. of the Generals Suite 124, Norristown, PA 19403  
OR
- Fax: Attn : Jordan Schubert, 610-630-9456

### **Athlete Leadership Facebook Group:**

Are you on Facebook and want to communicate more with your fellow athletes? Send a friend request to Jelsea Schrob (a combined name for myself, Jordan Schubert and Director of Programming Projects, Chelsea Drob) to be added to SOPA's Athlete Leadership Facebook group. This group is a great way to interact with athletes, as well as receive the most up to date Athlete Leadership information. If you're not on Facebook, creating an account is quick, easy and free!

**Email Address Update:** I would like to be able to reach as many athletes as possible. If you haven't received any emails from me, or your email address has changed in the last year, please email me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org).

**Share Your Story:** If you would like to share a story on the Outdoor/Indoor Winter Games or any other recent Special Olympics experiences, please e-mail me at [jschubert@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:jschubert@specialolympicspa.org) by March 31<sup>st</sup> for a chance to have your story shared in the Winter 2019 Edition of SOAR.