



Villanova Special Olympics 2020

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# Fall Fest Press: A Look Back

The spotlight is yours, together we shine



For Fall Fest this weekend, we spent time talking to each of you about how your weekend was going, and asking you to reflect on some questions that we put together. We know that this Fall Festival doesn't look the way that it has in past years, but we want to focus on what made this year amazing.

This year has brought difficulty for people across the country and the world, and we are so happy to have found a way to bring all of us together even if it couldn't be in person. Through the hard times and the lonely days in quarantine, what has kept us grounded and motivated are the smiles on your faces, the joy in your hearts, and your passion for sports and teamwork as you compete. Thank you for joining us this year for the first and hopefully only virtual fall fest; here's a look back on some moments from the weekend.

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## Cheering Continues: Daily Videos, LPH Flash Mob, Vols off the Walls

Cheering is a staple of Fall Festival! Committee tried to capture it through daily videos, featuring participants of all ages. Everyone wanted to give words of encouragement, say how much they missed seeing the athletes, and share some of their favorite Fall Fest memories.

Each year, some of the most energetic volunteers are the Local Program Hosts (LPHs). Over the course of the weekend, they will participate in flash mobs in O Town, at Victory Dance, and at various other campus locations. This year, the LPH committee edited a great video, covering a flurry of songs, and starring this year's LPH cohort! **Watson Dill**, one of the LPH leaders, reflects on this past weekend: "It was amazing! It was so much fun seeing the LPH's interact with the athletes on zoom! I also loved singing and dancing at the Victory Dance!"

In a brand new volunteer segment, **Justin Pritikin** starred as the host for "Vols off the Walls." In this clip, Justin engages with members of the Villanova community through trivia games alongside a Minion, Angry Bird, and Inclusion Bear. This electric segment helped raise awareness around Virtual Fall Festival, provided numerous laughs, and integrated the element of surprise. Justin was so excited to be able to bring joy to the athletes this Fall: "Virtual Fall Festival has been a really exciting challenge, and I'm so happy that the videos we created will be able to stay up year-round for all the athletes to access." He is also enthusiastic about next year's Fall Festival and is looking forward to creating more ideas!

**Madison DeLuca**, an LPH for this year had a fantastic quote about volunteering at Virtual Fall Festival: "Seeing everything come together for the athletes made me smile. I know that so many people put so much time and effort and making sure everything came together and it just made me smile to be a part of the virtual fall fest." We cannot be more excited to cheer you all in person soon!



## What has been your favorite part of the day (or weekend)?

- "Watching my teammates and having fun" -Katie Spencer (athlete)
- "Getting to know all of the amazing athletes!" -Marcus Brenes (IC)
- "Saturday zooms with the athletes was my favorite part!! I loved meeting them and being able to interact with so many awesome people!" -Carlie Pollice (LPH)
- "The lip sync battle" -Ian Capacio (athlete)
- "I love seeing the happiness of the athletes when talking about their sports even though they are not playing them. Their happiness rubs off on us who are coaching/supporting them." -Aidan Daniels (IC)
- "Meeting the athletes!" -Nikki Holmes (LPH)
- "The o town and volleyball videos and meeting new people" -Rosemary Furlong (athlete)
- "The best part of the day was meeting the amazing athletes and getting to hear about why they love soccer!" -Sarah Whynott (IC)
- "Bocce Zoom with the athletes" -Isabella Shender (LPH)
- "Being picked for the Red Team" -Sophia Czarzasty (athlete)
- "The soccer zoom was so much fun. It was very cool to be able to interact with the athletes and with everyone else involved in Fall Fest!" -Victoria Margenat (IC)
- "The Athlete Scavenger Hunt!" -Kenzie Andra (committee)
- "ZOOM competition" -Marla (athlete)
- "This is no surprise, but all of the members of SpO and all of the athletes have been nothing but kind, caring, and hilarious! Everyone has made me smile. It has been extremely rewarding to see everyone come together, cheer on the athletes, and spread love and inclusion, not only this weekend, but throughout my entire first semester at Villanova. I can't wait to see what the future holds for Inclusion Crew and Special Olympics!" -Skylar Musick (IC)
- "Athlete zooms" -Madison DeLuca (LPH)
- "Every thing" -Melissa Black (athlete)
- "Interacting with the athletes and my other volunteers!" -Brennan Ebert (IC)
- "Meeting the athletes and being able to talk to them. It was really fun being able to ask them questions and just have a really great conversation with them." -Rosa Marfia (LPH)
- "The open ceremony" -Sarah Mcstay (athlete)
- "Getting to Zoom with some of the athletes on Saturday" -Andrew Kline (IC)
- "The Zoom Meetings" -Kimberly S (athlete)



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## Competitions Zooms feature celebrity cameos, dance parties, lip synch battles, and ESPN style interviews

While we could not hold live competitions, the Competition Management Team wanted to provide an engaging athlete experience and each Fall Fest sport created kickoff videos and hosted live Zooms. The kickoff videos featured cameos from both Special Olympics and professional athletes. LDR/W interviewed former Olympians John Marshall, Jennifer Rhines, Gerry O'Reilly, and Marcus O'Sullivan.

As **Charlie Frank**, LDR/W Chair, described, "I always saw Olympians as the pinnacle of what it meant to be an athlete. If we could get words of wisdom from Villanova's greatest, it would resonate well with the athletes." In addition to these guests, the LDR/W kickoff featured Montco County athlete **Celine Heffron-Pero**. Charlie highlighted, "A big theme for this year was the accomplishments of the athletes in Virtual Fall Fest. They had to be extra brave amidst the circumstances in the world. Overcoming adversity is a challenge for all people of all abilities. We wanted to hear side by side how athletes at Fall Festival and in the Olympics can overcome challenges." Not to be outdone, Powerlifting's kickoff also had words of encouragement from proud Villanovans, Tanoh Kpassagnon from the Kansas City Chiefs and Eric Pascall from the Golden State Warriors.

This same energy was carried into the Zooms. After joining, athletes and volunteers would be assigned breakout rooms and asked ESPN style interview questions. Everyone was able to catch up, learn about the work each other has been putting in, and reignite the conversations and interactions that Fall Festival has become known for. After returning to the main room, there would be a group competition, spanning from dance parties at Roller Skating to Lip Synch Battles in Soccer!

**Bryan Blasband**, Soccer Chair, said that "Our vision was to get everyone excited and involved. We wanted to bring the competition aspect to the Zoom event though they had previously competed." They were certainly able to get the engagements they were looking for. Kimberly S, an athlete, commented that her favorite part of the weekend was "Being able to see my friends even though it was virtually."

Although competition was offline, the interactions and conversations in the breakout room provided the feel of a traditional Fall Festival. **Rosa Marfia**, an LPH spoke about an athlete in her breakout room, Katie who "made [her] smile throughout our whole breakout room because of how funny and sweet she was. [She] loved listening to her talk about all the things she was so passionate about." Keep on interacting with athletes through virtual platforms. We are all looking forward to inviting them back on campus soon!





## What has surprised you the most?

- "Being able to see everyone again." -Marla (athlete)
- "The scores came in early" -Sarah Mcstay (athlete)
- "The ability for the sessions to go well even with it being on Zoom. Communication is going well." -Aidan Daniels (IC)
- "When we won the lip sync contest" -Sophia Czarzasty (athlete)
- "The celebrities who cheered for us!!!" -Ian Capacio (athlete)
- "How you can connect with the athletes even over zoom " -Will Kendall (LPH)
- "The fact that so many people were able to pull together this online this year and make it work is just amazing." -Nikki Holmes (LPH)
- "The amazing volunteers" -Amy Malatak (athlete parent)
- "How interactive it was" -Marcus Brenes (IC)
- "You are still able to get hype about the events, even though they aren't in person which I think is awesome. " -Victoria Margenat (IC)
- "The amount of energy that was still present, despite the festival being fully online!" -Brennan Ebert (IC)
- "What surprised me most about Virtual Fall Festival was how happy the athletes were to be there! This year is completely different, but the excitement and fun are still very much there!" -Sarah Whynott (IC)
- "How fun it was! With everything being on zoom now, I think we all were slightly skeptical about how this would go, but I was so surprised! I had a great time on zoom with the athletes getting to know them and dancing with them!" -Rosa Marfia (LPH)
- "this my first zoom this year" -Katie Spencer (athlete)
- "All of it" -Melissa Black (athlete)
- "I was surprised how well put together the Victory Dance was!" -Kenzie Andra (committee)
- "How many fun activities were planned" -Isabella Shender (LPH)
- "How well organized it was" -Madison DeLuca (LPH)
- "The athletes still seemed very engaged and excited to participate despite the fact that we were each somewhere on our own staring at everyone through a computer screen." -Andrew Kline (IC)



## Ceremonies, Special Guests, and Athlete Emcees!

Lights! Camera! Action! The theme for the 32nd Fall Festival is Hollywood, and Ceremonies did not disappoint! Friday night was the premiere of Opening Ceremonies, which captured numerous speakers in its hour segment. **Meg Burke**, Ceremonies Chair agreed with the crowd saying, “The two people that made our ceremonies were our emcees, **Jenn** from Monroe County and **Jack** from Chester County. They’re athletes and global messengers and brought a lot of life and personality. My favorite part was filming with them, getting their thoughts, and hearing them add their own pazzazz.” They introduced features from Special Olympics, the Villanova Basketball Team, student dance groups, event sponsors, and even Flo from the Progressive Commercials! In the virtual environment, it still captured the torch run progressing from Philadelphia to Villanova’s campus.

**Daniel Estrada**, Ceremonies Assistant, explained that “We tried our hardest to maintain its wonderful traditions through a virtual interface, whether a unified star spangled banner, county processions.” In the County Processions, athlete representatives from each county submitted a short, encouraging video for their peers. This was followed by a cheering segment from Villanova volunteers. It was incredible to see the athletes getting engaged in Opening Ceremonies from their homes!

Closing Ceremonies concluded the fantastic weekend. Playing into the theme, Meg described it as a “Red carpet event so the athletes can feel like they’re being inducted into the Hall of Fame.” In a formal affair, Awards and Ceremonies filmed in the new John Mullen Center for the Performing Arts. The ceremony included an inspirational speech from former Steelers Running Back and brought back fan favorites Jen and Jack as Emcees! The highlight of the event was the presentation of the Philadelphia Insurance Valor Award to **Meghan Greim** of Chester County. After her coach Monica Lepore shared incredible anecdotes about Meghan’s positivity, Meghan followed up with a speech of her own! Meghan’s story and attitude is truly exemplary, and we want to wish her congratulations!

All in all, **Francesca Guarrera**, Ceremonies Assistant, said, “Our vision was to continue shining a spotlight on all the athletes and shape that so everyone felt like a star from their homes.” Athletes, you are all stars, and we have been so fortunate to see your accomplishments and cheer you on!



## Who or what has made you smile today?

- "Seeing all my Villanova friends" -Ian Capacio (athlete)
- "Seeing all of the athletes smile and have a great time" -Marcus Brenes (IC)
- "My mother Diane Spencer is my coach always makes me smile " -Katie Spencer (athlete)
- "It made me smile to see the athletes so happy! Even though it was not the ideal situation to do Special Olympics online, the athletes really made the most of it and I'm glad they all were still able to have some fun!" -Nikki Holmes (LPH)
- "The athletes and all of the coaches that put in all of there hard work" -Rosemary Furlong (athlete)
- "All of the athletes being so enthusiastic :)" -Aidan Daniels (IC)
- "My friend Rosemary" -Sarah Mcstay (athlete)
- "The athletes who reconnected over Zoom today made me smile!" -Sarah Whynott (IC)
- "My Dad" -Sophia Czarzasty (athlete)
- "One of the athletes shared my favorite band" -Will Kendall (LPH)
- "The Support Services Committee!" -Kenzie Andra
- "All of the volunteers" -Amy Malatak (athlete parent)
- "Seeing everybody and talking with everyone" -Marla (athlete)
- "We had a dance off/lip sync battle and it was a ton of fun" -Victoria Margenat (IC)
- "The excitement that one player, Lily, showed as she experienced her first Fall Festival in the Soccer Zoom!" -Brennan Ebert (IC)
- "Everyone" -Melissa Black (athlete)
- "Getting to see how excited all the athletes were about everything still" -Isabella Shender (LPH)





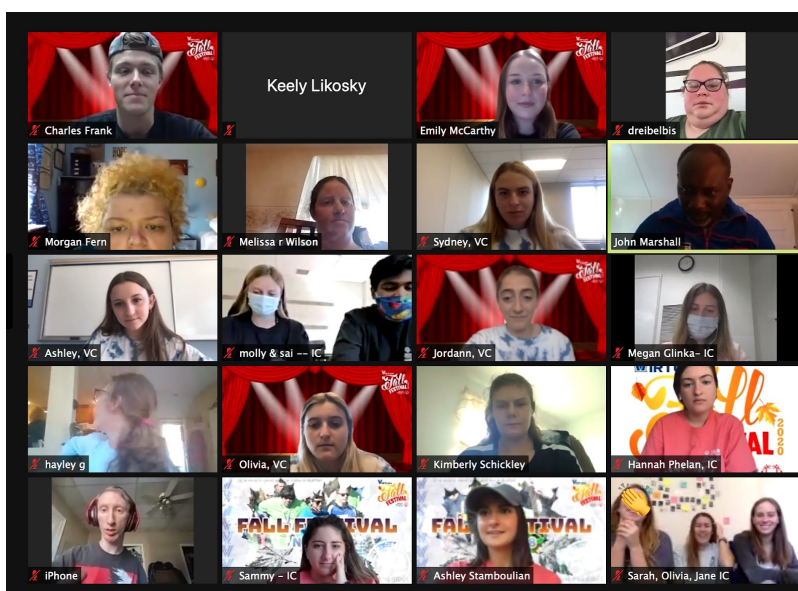
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## Dance the night away! Victory Dance is a hit!

On Saturday night at 7 o'clock, DJ Eric led Villanova Fall Fest in a legendary dance party! The night was filled with great songs and even better dance moves as athletes, their families, and Villanova students enjoyed dancing with each other from afar. As everyone danced, pictures of past Fall Fest experiences were put on the screen. Everyone could highlight themselves dancing, or memories from the past few years where friendships were made! **Sarah Fitzpatrick**, Chair of the Entertainment Committee that planned the Victory Dance, shared her thoughts on Fall Fest: "My virtual Fall Fest experience was one for the books. With the state of the world right now, it was the much needed light, hope, and optimism that I think a lot of us needed. I want to extend my most heartfelt congratulations to all the athletes who participated and all the coaches who helped show worthy of the spotlight each athlete is."

Although we wish we could see each other in person, the Victory Dance was a perfect way to feel as connected as possible through the music. **Rosemary Furlong**, an athlete, said, "It was going to be different this year. A lot of new things like opening ceremonies, awards, and closing games. I liked the victory dance." It was wonderful to feel connected despite all the challenges. At the end of the night, Victory Dance was definitely a success! We hope everyone enjoyed dancing the night away together! Media and Publicity was there to capture all of the memories of the weekend! When we spoke with **Martin Manion**, an assistant on M&P, he highlighted the energy in the Zooms and during Victory Dance and was incredibly happy with how the weekend turned out!





## Is there anything about virtual Fall Fest that you hope continues once it is back in person?

- "Yes. I hope that we can meet all the celebrities who were on virtual. It will help everyone in the world learn about the Inclusion Revolution." -Ian Capacio (athlete)
- "I hope to see the Virtual Fall Fest implemented to have any athletes join in to watch their sports in case they are not able to make it in person!" -Aidan Daniels (IC)
- "I'm a freshman, so I can't really base this experience off of anything else. However, even though it was only on zoom, there was still such a strong sense of community and unity throughout this weekend and I really hope that in future years when we are finally able to participate in person for Fall Fest that that never changes" -Rosa Marfia (LPH)
- "Dance with my friend" -Sarah Mcstay (athlete)
- "The biweekly athlete newsletter!!" -Kenzie Andra (committee)
- "The light and happy atmosphere of the competition made everyone smile and be happy which is something that I believe should be at the forefront of what Special Olympics does." -Andrew Kline (IC)
- "Just excited to do this for the first time in person" -Sophia Czarzasty (athlete)
- "Soccer Zoom held a Lip Sync Battle between the two teams' committee members, which should definitely become an in-person event!" -Brennan Ebert (IC)



## Healthy Athletes & Food Committee tackle healthy eating!

Healthy Habits is a staple of the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program, and this year it made its debut on the virtual stage! To create the video, they got help from various athlete liaisons, corporate sponsors, and other committees.

**Keely Likosky** and **Kenzie Andra** were two Food Committee members who facilitated Cooking Shows and the Athlete Newsletters. This committee made yogurt parfait, date energy balls, hummus, and oatmeal cookie bars tutorials for all the athletes to try at home. As Keely noted, "I spent my quarantine baking and cooking as a way to relieve stress and fill time, and I loved bringing recipes to the athletes that I had been making." They also enjoyed writing the biweekly Athlete Newsletter that included spotify playlists, movie reviews, healthy habits, and much more! Both Keely and Kenzie thought the weekend was very well put together: "It was amazing watching everyone come together over Zoom to share their passion for competition and inclusion. Everyone was there to smile, cheer each other on, and dance."

**Trent Dowell** is the Healthy Athletes Chair for Virtual Fall Festival 2020. This year, Healthy Athletes worked hard to create a healthy habit video for all the athletes! Included in this video are healthy snack options, exercise tips, and more! The video also features the Food Committee members, who made a delicious yogurt parfait for the athletes to replicate at home. Trent and his team have been working hard all year to create an unforgettable experience for the participants: "I was so happy to see the athletes this year, even if it was through a virtual setting. It is so important that we try to stay connected, and this year's Fall Festival was an excellent example of how we can do this even through a global pandemic."



### Any other comments?

- "I would like to give a shout out to all of the pa special Olympics staff for all of there hard work"  
-Rosemary Furlong (athlete)
- "I'm so excited to hear about the athletes' experiences this weekend!" -Kenzie Andra (committee)
- "I want to shoutout my LPH leaders for being so awesome!!!! Even though everything was on zoom they did such an awesome job with LPH and made it so fun and enjoyable. Caroline Connelly, Izzy Stone, Watson Dill, and Eric Lavin are literally the best! They helped create so many friendships and made this weekend a blast!" -Rosa Marfia (LPH)
- "Thank you for all your efforts. The Czarzasty Family really appreciates it." -Sophia Czarzasty (athlete)
- "Molly & Sai did a great job throughout the whole process of planning, holding meetings, and getting us our supplies leading up to Fall Fest." -Andrew Kline (IC)
- "I just want to thank the whole Villanova family for making this virtual Fall Fest a memorable one."  
-Ian Capacio (athlete)
- "Shoutout to the leadership committee they were awesome in leading the group discussions"  
-Will Kendall (LPH)
- "I love my friend Rosemary Furlong" -Sarah Mcstay (athlete)
- "Shout out to the amazing LPH leaders!" -Nikki Holmes (LPH)



