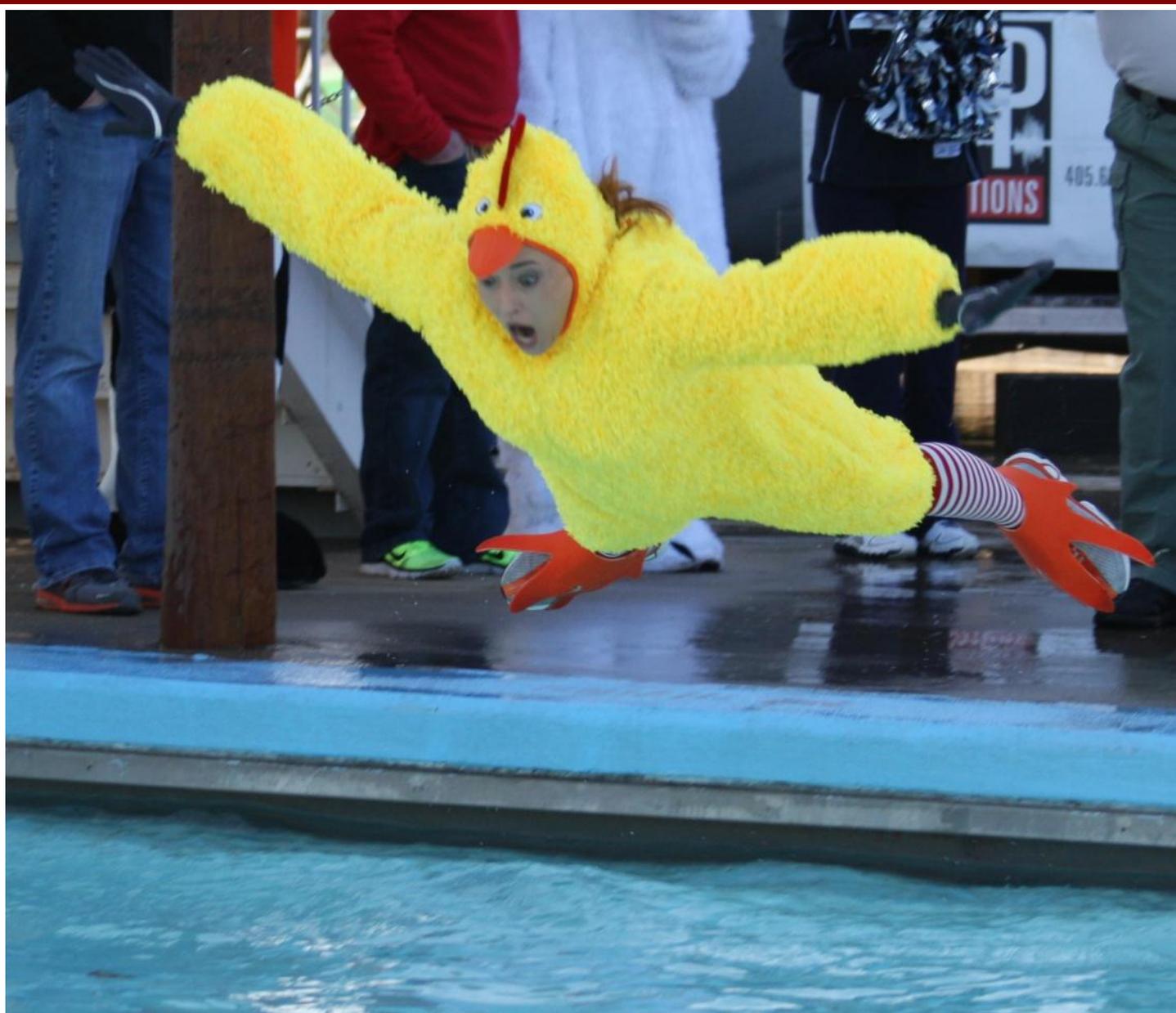


Winter/Spring 2014

The Guardian

The Newsletter of the Law Enforcement Torch Run® Executive Council



POLAR PLUNGE®

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Front Cover Photo provided by: Special Olympics Oklahoma

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Mike Peretti, LETR Executive Council

"Every child deserves a voice to be heard. Every child deserves a second chance in life. Every child deserves an opportunity and basic right to compete and succeed in life. My passion is wanting everyone to succeed and be proud of who they are. I am proud of who I am. This is the pride and reward of your achievement."

Shaun Seller, SO Athlete, Adelaide, Australia, Asia Pacific Games 2013

Each day, those of us committed to the Law Enforcement Torch Run®, learn more and more from the athletes of Special Olympics. We learn from their relentless pursuit of inclusion and their endless admiration for those who fight the fights along side of them, the members of the Law Enforcement Torch Run. We learn, and are reminded that their dreams are no different then those of others, the dream to succeed, the dream to accomplish our goals.

In the fast paced chaos of our personal and professional lives, coupled with our passion to fulfill our mission as Torch Runners, it is easy to forget the lessons of our athletes; that which should keep us all grounded to our cause.

The accomplishments we have made in the name of the Law Enforcement Torch Run are unparalleled in the history of Special Olympics. But as you keep your sights set on a better life for those with intellectual disabilities and focus on even greater goals, do not forget to take a moment to cherish the journey and those we meet along the way. Relish in the work you do every day for your communities and the Torch Run. Take pride in the fact that you have changed the lives of many.

Remember the lessons and the dreams of our athletes and our achievements as a movement. If you believe in the dreams to succeed, and the dream to accomplish our goals, then take a moment to realize as a Torch Runner, you are LIVING THE DREAM!



Sergeant Jason Stevenson named Torch Runner of the Year

By Jon Buzby, Special Olympics Delaware

Jason Stevenson has done just about everything possible as a member of Delaware Law Enforcement for Special Olympics.

The Delaware State Police sergeant has helped organize, and participated in, several fundraising events. In May, he'll rappel 17 stories for the fourth straight year as part of the Over the Edge event.

He has coached for three years and has presented hundreds of medals at events of all sizes for more than a decade.

And although Stevenson has run in the Law Enforcement Torch Run® here locally and across the world, the one thing he has never had the privilege to do is light the cauldron at the Opening Ceremony of the Special Olympics Delaware Summer Games.

He'll get that opportunity this year.

Stevenson has been named the 2014 Delaware Torch Runner of the Year, an honor awarded annually to recognize a Delaware police officer's outstanding contributions to Special Olympics Delaware and the Torch Run.

"Jason Stevenson typifies the many unsung heroes involved and committed to the Delaware Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics," said John Miller, state director of Delaware Law Enforcement for Special Olympics. "He is well-deserving of this award, which is the highest honor bestowed on a Delaware torch run volunteer."

Stevenson was recognized at a special gathering of police chiefs on April 8 and will have the distinct privilege of carrying the Flame of Hope into the Opening Ceremony of the 2014 Summer Games.



Attorney General Beau Biden attended a special ceremony at the Dover Police Department on April 8 to honor Delaware State Police Sgt. Jason Stevenson on being named Delaware Torch Runner of the Year. Also pictured is Elizabeth Nolan, 2014 SODE Outstanding Athlete, who along with Stevenson, will light the cauldron at the Summer Games Opening Ceremony. (photo by Ann Grunert)

"Through my experience with Special Olympics, I've learned how this organization has a positive effect on the athletes and their families in addition to the positive effect it has had on me," he said after learning of the recognition.

Stevenson's first involvement was as a rookie police officer participating in the 2002 Torch Run, an annual 160-mile journey of the Flame of Hope that takes place as a prelude to the Opening Ceremony of the Summer Games. He eventually became involved in the logistical aspects of the Torch Run as a leg coordinator and agency representative.

But Stevenson wanted to do even more, and so when asked, he expanded his

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volunteer role at a local bowling event, presenting awards to the athletes.

“After presenting medals at a bowling competition, I discovered just how important the Special Olympics movement is,” Stevenson recalled.

That experience prompted the Dagsboro resident to get even more involved at the grassroots level, this time as a powerlifting coach. And it’s in that role where Stevenson admits he’s learned much more than he’s been able to teach.

“I get to spend time with athletes who teach me patience, persistence and the true spirit of competition,” he shared.

In 2011, Stevenson joined an elite group as a runner in the Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg for the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Greece. He spent three weeks with officers and athletes from all corners of the world, running the Flame of Hope through Greece en route to the Opening Ceremony at Panathinaiko Stadium.

“Getting to live with these athletes for three full weeks while watching them grow and overcome their fears and challenges gave me a new perspective on things that I had often taken for granted,” Stevenson shared of his most memorable Special Olympics experience. “It was inspiring to see their commitment and watch just how much they were able to accomplish when given an opportunity.”

“Running with the Flame of Hope throughout Greece was the experience of a lifetime,” he added.

When Stevenson runs the torch into this year’s Opening Ceremony and then joins Elizabeth Nolan (2014 Outstanding Athlete) to light the cauldron and officially open the Games, it will fulfill a dream the

longtime torch runner has had since the beginning of his involvement more than a decade ago.

“I’m aware of what the Flame of Hope represents and how much it means to the athletes of Special Olympics,” said Stevenson, who will also carry the torch several miles through Sussex County on Thursday. “It will be a great honor to conclude the statewide journey and be a part of delivering the Flame of Hope to the Opening Ceremony. I look forward to this experience and hope that it brings great joy to everyone who has a part in this year’s Summer Games.”

(Photo provided by Ann Grunert)

Laissez Les Bon Temps Rouler (Let the Good Times Roll) at the 2014 International Law Enforcement Torch Run® Conference

By Tiffany Harvey-Gautier, Special Olympics Louisiana

Louisiana is proud to host the annual International Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR) Conference in true New Orleans fashion. You won't want to miss this conference! Bring your appetite, money and camera to capture every moment of the Big Easy!

A Taste of New Orleans

Instead of a hospitality night, we will start the evening of Tuesday, September 9 with a Taste of New Orleans Host Night! This is a night you will not want to miss. It will feature New Orleans cuisine, culture, music, drinks and much more! Join us in the second line parade, led by a New Orleans traditional Jazz Band, from the Hilton Riverside hotel to the historic Sugar Mill. Next we will "Let the good times roll!" all night, with Mardi Gras floats, flambeaus and a photo booth, all while enjoying Zydeco and Cajun music.

Dine & Drink

During the conference New Orleans coupon books will be on sale at the Louisiana registration table. You won't want to leave the hotel without this book, featuring discounts at all the New Orleans and French Quarter hot spots. The coupons expire on September 19 and will include a map directing you to the best restaurants, stores, and bars in town.

Best Auction in History

Be sure to start saving your money now for the best Auction in Conference history! The auction will start on Thursday, September 11 in the late afternoon at the hotel. Everything from alligator heads to zydeco music will be for sale. Some of the hot ticket items include, historical law enforcement memorabilia, LETR keepsakes, artwork and jewelry by local artists, voodoo dolls, New Orleans seasonings and crawfish pots. Come early to bid on the big ticket item, a Glock firearm engraved with the new LETR logo.

Torch Run

Make sure to register for the Torch Run on Friday, September 12 at 7:00am before the end of the Conference! This is a run you will surely be telling your friends and family about for months. Don't forget your camera as this route allows you to see and snap photos of the best New Orleans attractions, from the river front to the French Quarter, the route is a virtual tourist's dream, passing along world famous locations such as Jackson Square, Café Du Monde and the one and only Saint Louis Cathedral.

Sportsman's Paradise

Don't leave Louisiana, also known as Sportsman's Paradise, without playing Unified Sports. You will play a variety of sports alongside Special Olympics Louisiana athletes with a Cajun twist.

Remember to stop by the Louisiana Registration booth when you arrive on September 9 so you can register for all of these exciting, one-of-a-kind, true Louisiana style activities! We are sure this will be a conference you will never forget! Save the dates September 9 – 13 for a fun filled trip to the Big Easy!



Fitting In — Law Enforcement as a Unified Partner

By Brandon Schatsiek, Special Olympics Missouri

Fitting in can sometimes be troublesome, especially if people think they don't have any shared commonalities.

Therein lies a potential difficulty in growing the Unified Partners (UP) program in Special Olympics Missouri – but only if the focus is on peoples' differences instead of their similarities.

Unified Sports is an inclusive program that pairs individuals with intellectual disabilities (SOMO athletes) and individuals without IDs (partners) on sports teams for training and competition in 21 Olympic-type sports divisioned by age and ability.

It might seem like growing such a program would be difficult, but only if someone focuses on the differences. It doesn't take too long, however, to see there are many more similarities between our athletes and our Unified Partners than differences.

If there's one person who could be considered the poster girl for ignoring the differences and highlighting the

similarities between athletes and UPs, it's UP and Lee's Summit Police Officer Amanda Geno.

"Amanda is awesome," said coach Bea Webb of the Jackson County Parks and Rec Special Population Services team. "She has become a big sister, a role model to the guys and girls of our team. She's just a great young lady; she's dignified, but laughs and jokes with them as if she was one of them."

Geno, 29, is one of them. As a UP, she's considered a Special Olympics athlete – and her fellow athletes love her.

"She's a lot of fun," said SOMO Athlete Brittany Selken. "She wants to be around all of the time."

Selken, 23, and Geno have been partners for a little more than a year in softball and bowling. Selken has already taken a liking to Geno, mainly because of her authenticity.

"She's just so understanding, loveable, caring and there for you when you need somebody to talk to," Selken said. "When my mom passed away, she was there for me to talk to and understand what I was going through."

Geno said the experience of being a UP is what you make of it.

"It's hard to decide what I most enjoy as a UP," Geno said. "Sometimes I laugh until I cry and sometimes they laugh out loud at me when I trip over the ball return or do something goofy. I also enjoy how excited they are to see me and are



Amanda Geno, left, accepts an award from Kansas City Metro Area Regional Development Director Kami Delameter. COURTESY PHOTO

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always quick to ask how my weekend was or how I've been.

"I'm proud to introduce and claim my partners and team. I make them a part of my life outside of SOMO."

'Almost like it was meant to be' Geno first became involved with Special Olympics in 2002 after selecting her college sorority based on its already-existing relationship with Special Olympics. She went on to help a Special Olympics wheelchair slalom team practice with her college cross country team.

Following college, Geno became a police officer and joined the Law Enforcement Torch Run, which helped further the cause in Geno's eyes.

"It's almost like it was meant to be." she said.

Staying busy in the past few years, Geno has gone out of her way to become more involved with SOMO. Fellow Lee's Summit police officer Mark Wiesemann said that Geno has been pushing to do more with the LETR.

"What separates her from other officers involved in LETR is that she goes to many more events," Wiesemann said. "Whether it's to pass out medals or to participate as a Unified Partner® ... she has also helped coordinate a Torch Run and also assists both in the planning and set-up of the Polar Plunge®."

Kami Delameter, regional development director for SOMO, said Geno is the embodiment for what LETR is all about. "Amanda is a wonderful representation of our partnership with law enforcement," Delameter said. "She has embraced SOMO in all aspects – torch runner, Plunge committee member, Games Management Team (GMT) member and general event-day volunteer.



"She's gotten her mom and boyfriend (another law enforcement officer) involved with volunteering also."

Geno said she wanted to serve on the games management teams because she can be the voice of the athletes and make sure they are heard in the planning of events in and around the KC Metro Area events.

"I wanted to serve on several GMTs because I know the athletes; I know what's important to them; I know what they like and don't like," she said. "I decided to join the Plunge committee because the KC Metro Area Plunge is the best. It has been run by a Lee's Summit officer for the last 10 years, and it is just another way to be involved by creating awareness and raising funds for the athletes."

Coach Webb said this push to become immersed in the behind-the-scenes aspect of SOMO is what makes Geno so invaluable.

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“She surrounds herself in our program,” Webb said. “I asked her why and she didn’t even hesitate to say, ‘It’s a part of my life.’”

“It’s a part of her.”

A little MO Magic

In June 2013, Geno took part in SOMO’s USA Games Selection Camp at the Missouri Military Academy in Mexico, Mo. She qualified for the bowling team and will compete alongside fellow athlete Tiffany Wright at the 2014 USA Games, June 14-21, in New Jersey.

This will be the first time Geno will compete at a national level for Special Olympics Missouri and it’s safe to say she’s a little excited about the opportunity.

“I’m learning as I go, and I’m pretty sure I’m just as excited as the athletes,” Geno said. “I’m proud to be their voice if they need it, their shoulder to cry on when things get tough and an encouraging voice when they are having a bad game.”

“After I was nominated by Coach Webb, I wanted to join the team because the athletes know I’m there for them and want the absolute best for them. And on the same hand, they know I expect nothing but the best through a lot of hard work. I wanted to experience the opportunities these athletes will have all thanks to Special Olympics.”

So, why did coach Webb pick Geno as a Unified Partner for the Team Missouri bowling team?

“The fact that she’s an officer, I thought it’d be great to have a volunteer officer on the team and how she gets along so well with all of the other bowlers,” Webb said.

“I noticed one day at bowling practice she was tutoring an athlete in their schoolwork in between taking turns bowling. She’s very respectful to the athlete and herself.”

Geno said she wants to go to New Jersey so badly that she would have taken any spot on Team Missouri, regardless of the sport.

“The athletes put a smile on my face and teach me to be a better person every minute I’m around them,” she said. “I can’t wait to go on this journey with them. And then when I return to Missouri, I can’t wait to tell all of my family, friends and co-workers about the experience, hoping to spark an interest in volunteering.”



POLAR PLUNGE FOR A CAUSE!

By: Cody Jansma, Ontario Law Enforcement Torch Run

Polar Plunging for a Cause!

Over the course of February and March, the Ontario Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics hosted six Polar Plunge® events across the province in: York Region, Kingston, Sudbury, Owen Sound, North Bay and Thunder Bay. The collective goal was to raise \$120,000, and we are proud to announce that we have shattered our target and raised an incredible \$180,000 for Special Olympics! We would like to thank our event

organizers for their tireless dedication and commitment and most importantly, the donors, for your generous and ongoing support. *Thank you!*



Guardians of the Flame

The Owen Sound Polar Dip celebrated its 15th Anniversary this year and had one of its most successful years to date despite the frigid cold weather. Plunge event co-chair Jana Waghorn said, "There were more than 70 Plungers and over \$10,000 raised for the charity!" Waghorn noted that the excitement of the crowd gave her that "extra boost of energy" when the time came for her to jump in. "The event was promoted in local schools, which helped boost numbers," she said.

North Bay hosted its 1st Annual Polar Plunge after being awarded the 2015 Provincial Winter Games next January. "The event was a tremendous success," Merv Shantz, Special Olympics Ontario 2015 Winter Games Manager said. "We raised \$50,000 and had over 150 Plungers." Shantz applauds the 50 volunteers who turned out to assist in pulling the city's first Polar Plunge together, but he is overwhelmed with the support the group has received from the entire city. "We hope to run as an annual event. This was a wonderful display of North Bay's community spirit and their support of Special Olympics Athletes. Without the community's involvement, this event would not have been the huge success we saw on Saturday!"

Cody Jansma, Manager of the Ontario Law Enforcement Torch Run was thrilled with the success. "What a tremendous show of support from across the Province. Communities were galvanized by the Plunges. We are appreciative of the incredible generosity they showed towards us." Jansma believes that the Polar Plunge program will only grow from here. "We already have 5 communities who want to host their 1st Annual Plunge in the Winter of 2015, and we hope to add more to that list. As always, our goal is raise more money and awareness for Special Olympics, and we think we have a great opportunity to do just that with the Plunges."

MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS FOUNDATION SUPPORTS LETR

By: Mike Teem, LETR Director

On February 5, 2014, the Motorola Solutions Foundation awarded a \$50,000 grant to the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics to support the LETR Executive Council's training programs and initiatives throughout 2014. This award follows an initial \$50,000 grant in 2013 for the same purposes.

The Motorola Solutions Foundation's Public Safety Grants aim to support safety education and training programs for first responders, their families and the general public in the United States and Canada. The funds provided by the Motorola Solutions Foundation will be used to support regional LETR training conferences, LETR presentations at IACP regional conferences, and the 2014 LETR International Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. All of the concurrent training sessions at this year's LETR Conference are sponsored and presented by Motorola Solutions Foundation as a part of this grant award.

Motorola is also connected and involved with several state and provincial LETR and Special Olympics programs, participating in fundraising events and providing volunteer opportunities for their employees. The LETR Executive Council and Special Olympics Inc. are appreciative of this strong support from a company that has long championed the cause of law enforcement around the world.



**MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS
FOUNDATION**



Minnesota Plunge

By Special Olympics Minnesota LETR

Special Olympics Minnesota and the Law Enforcement Torch Run® had another wonderful Polar Plunge® season. Despite a record cold winter, over 16,000 plungers braved the elements to support Special Olympics Minnesota. Many law enforcement volunteers endured freezing temperatures to make these events possible.

One change to the Plunges this year was a push to further the involvement of Special Olympics teams. Through this initiative, Special Olympics Minnesota teams raised 77% more funds than in 2013. We are excited to see what the future holds for the Minnesota Polar Bear Plunges!



Law enforcement volunteers for the 2014 Minnesota Polar Bear Plunges endured record cold temperatures.

Oklahoma Polar Plunge® 2014

By Jennifer Lightle, Special Olympics Oklahoma

The polar vortex might have chilled the nation to the bone this past winter, but Oklahomans think real cold is running into a freezing body of water – maybe wearing a costume, maybe wearing just a swimsuit – submerging themselves in completely and then racing back out again with a brand new layer of icicles. Some might call that insanity. For the past 12 years, however, Special Olympics Oklahoma has called it the Polar Plunge®.

What started with one plunge has now grown to 12 locations across the state. For those more sensitive to insanely cold temperatures, there is also the Too Chicken to Plunge option, where people can raise the \$75 minimum and take advantage of everything the event offers without having to brave the freezing water. People can also create teams to either toss their boss, teacher or principals into the water. Even with those drier, warmer options, the Polar Plunges in Oklahoma had over 1,161 plungers fling themselves into freezing water to raise a cool \$240,000 in 2014.



Torch Run Seizes the Freeze in Virginia

By Ellen E.F. Head, Special Olympics Virginia

Special Olympics Virginia owes a big “thank you” to the over 390 Torch Run officers who seized the freeze for Special Olympics Virginia in February! While some splashed into the icy Atlantic at the Polar Plunge® Winter Festival in Virginia Beach, others dashed into the chilly Potomac at Tim’s Rivershore Polar Plunge Festival in Dumfries, Camp Hydaway Lake in Lynchburg at the Hill City Polar Plunge Festival and the New River Valley in Radford at the Highlander Polar Plunge Celebration – and many more provided helping hands on the sidelines.

Leading the charge into the icy waters was 2014 Virginia Torch Run State Chair, Chesapeake Sheriff O’Sullivan, who was joined by three other Torch Run leaders: Fairfax Police Chief Roessler, Richmond Police Chief Tarasovic and retired Fairfax Police Chief Rorher.

Team True Blue with the Department of Corrections took home the top law enforcement team fundraising prize at the Virginia Beach event, with more than \$10,000 raised. In total, Torch Run fundraising efforts for all plunge events brought in over \$250,000 of the \$1,335,000 raised. **Now that’s COOL!**



Sheriff Jim O’Sullivan (Chesapeake Sheriff’s Office), the 2014 State Chair of Special Olympic Virginia’s Torch Run, getting ready to plunge at our Virginia Beach Polar Plunge with his sons.

Statewide Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics New York Committee Inducts Nick Zmuda as First Ever Athlete Member to the Committee
By Erin McCartan, LETR New York



Nick Zmuda, a 31 year old from Lackawanna, has been competing in Special Olympics for over 18 years. At age 13, Nick started training in track and field, and over the years has participated in softball, basketball, figure skating as well as bowling. He has traveled all over the world to compete, including traveling to Anchorage Alaska to compete in the World Games. Nick is also a Global Messenger and has spoken at various events. Most recently, Nick won the 2012 Law Enforcement Torch Run® International Executive Council Athlete Award. Nick was chosen out of all the Special Olympic Athletes across the world and was recognized for his dedication and participation in Special Olympics and the Torch Run.

During the week Nick attends program at People Inc. and spends his free time in the net stopping goals for the Buffalo Sabres. Nick continually participates in Special Olympic events like Law and Orders, Over the Edge, Polar Plunges® and much more!

Captain Steven A. Nigrelli of the New York State Police, Troop A, and the New York State LETR Director, made the motion at New York's bi-annual meeting in April to have a Special Olympics athlete serve on the statewide committee. When asked why it is so important to have a Special Olympics athlete on the statewide committee, Nigrelli said, "Nick and the athletes that will follow him, who are appointed to serve on the LETR State Committee will bring their passion and experience with Special Olympics to our organization; which help guide us in future endeavors and decision making." He continued to say that on a personal level, "Having Nick serve as the first ever Athlete to serve on the NYS Law Enforcement Torch Run State Committee is really special considering the friendship we have built over the years. Nick truly embodies everything that is awesome about Special Olympics, and we are so fortunate to be able to work with him in his new role as State Committee Member."

Nick is also very excited to begin his new duties as the athlete representative on the NY LETR committee. When Steve called him and asked if he would serve, his response was "when can I start?". Nick truly embodies the spirit of Special Olympics and understands the value of the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics movement.



Iceland's First Ever Law Enforcement Torch Run®

By Gudmundur Sigurdsson and Karen Asta Fridjonsdottir, LETR Iceland

After the successful Special Olympics World Games in Athens in 2011, the Director of Special Olympics in Iceland asked if we could look into the Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR). After Iceland was invited to participate at the European LETR Conference in Brussels 10.-13. October 2013, it was decided that article authors, Gudmundur Sigurdsson detective and his wife Karen Asta Fridjonsdottir, would go to the conference. Gudmundur representing Icelandic police and Karen representing Special Olympics in Iceland, and we didn't need to be asked twice.

And then it was time for Iceland's first Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics conference held in Brussels. We had a vague idea of what we were going into, but we were full of confidence. As we arrived at the conference, we were greeted by an interesting Irish man named Jeremy Adams and he welcomed us to our first conference. Then the conference began and we had some anxiety in our stomachs about how this all was. We sat and wrote down everything that was said and tried to be diligent to ask questions and learn about LETR. I think we learned a lot and met a lot of good people who were with us at the conference. All were full of enthusiasm and ideas, so we got excited and wanted to do our best with the conditions of our first Torch Run in Iceland. Iceland was the only "new" country of the conference, while the other nations were Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Gibraltar. All the nations were very helpful towards us. The other countries told us when they began LETR in their countries, what has been successful, and also from what was not so successful. They gave us good advice and told us all about LETR. We really enjoyed it and were determined to start a LETR in Iceland. At the conference, Iceland was delivered the LETR torch so we could start the LETR in Iceland. We got a torch, ideology and motivation.

After we returned to Iceland, we began to introduce police officers and Special Olympics in Iceland to what we had learned at the conference. Consequently, it was decided that the first Torch Run in Iceland would be in the Icelandic Special Olympics Games in Reykjanesbaer on 10 November 2013. Discussions were held with the Chief of Police of the Southwest, the chief of police in the capital, Reykjavík, the chairman of the National Association of Police Officers, State Police Chief and general officers were all very pleased with this contribution. My wife and I organized a Torch Run, and we were super proud that the first Torch Run was conducted and managed really good. A total of 20 police officers participated in the run in wind and rain. The race was about 1.5 kilometers through the streets in Reykjanesbaer. The torch was lighted by the Commissioner of Police in Southwest and a competitor who was our son, indoors in the Reykjanesbaer stadium and the games began there.

It should be noted that me and my wife translated "Flame of Hope" into Icelandic and it is like this "Logi Vonarinnar."

Thanks again for allowing Iceland to participate in such a great projects, and we look forward to our next project for LETR in Iceland, which will be for the SO Iceland National Games on 25 May 2014.



St. Patricks Day Polar Plunge—Naas, Ireland

On Monday 17 March 2014, Police Service of Northern Ireland LETR members Steve Douglas and Naomi Morrison headed from Belfast, Northern Ireland across the border into Southern Ireland to the picturesque town of Naas, just outside Dublin complete with the Polar Plunge® pool, scaffold frame and fancy dress outfits for the first ever St Patricks Day Polar Plunge in Ireland!

After meeting up with our Garda colleagues led by Sergeant Garry Madden, we set about erecting the Polar Plunge pool at a prime location in Naas town centre. At 10:00 a.m., we saw the arrival of a hearty band of Garda colleagues, Special Olympics athletes and volunteers to begin the 8 hour plunge - it was supposed to be once-on-the-hour, every hour, but at times, it was more like once every 20 minutes! Great fun was had by all, the weather was fine, and even though the Polar Plunge wasn't quite as arduous as previous events in Ireland, we still were "Freezin' for a Reason" and managed to generate a huge amount of publicity, awareness and much needed funds for Special Olympics Ireland.

Almost 10000 Euro has been raised with some more money still to come in! As it was St Patricks Day, everything was green – t-shirts, hats and even the beer afterwards! We can't wait until next year!

Please see the attached pics for an idea of the fun and action.



Sergeant Syd Barnes

By Gretyl Macalaster, Special Olympics New Hampshire



Courtesy Photo: Sgt. Syd Barnes will represent the State of New Hampshire during the 2014 USA Games Torch Run.

In his day job as a correctional officer, Sergeant Syd Barnes does not often experience feelings of positivity. So the chance to gather with other law enforcement to do something that put correctional officers in a more positive light is exactly what Barnes was looking for when he started working at the Hillsborough County Department of Corrections in Manchester, New Hampshire more than 13 years ago.

Today, Barnes is one of the state's most committed members of the Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR), helping to generate funds and runners for the annual event ahead of the State Summer Games.

His enthusiasm rubs off on others and has also earned him recognition nationally for his involvement. In June, Barnes will represent the Granite State in the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games Torch Run in Mercer County, New Jersey.

The father of three is full of humor, and it would not be uncommon to see him donning a pair of flip flops to show off the latest polish color his daughters applied to his nails.

Barnes and his wife, Lisa, have been married for almost 15 years, and Barnes said his wife is nothing but supportive about his commitment to Special Olympics.

Barnes is also a runner. He ran in high school and through college and has completed two Boston Marathons and a New York City marathon. "I attempted a 50-miler. I only made it 37½, but don't worry, I'll conquer it," Barnes said.

When Barnes first learned about LETR, he thought it was a race and spent weeks before his first event training only to learn about the team aspect of the event. Barnes said he was immediately hooked. "I took more pride running with people instead of against other runners," Barnes said. "It goes with our work philosophy, start together; end together."

He was also moved by the athlete speakers that year and how the community and law enforcement came together for the cause.

He said people in law enforcement often only receive attention for negative things or are seen in a negative light. The connection with Special Olympics allows others to see the positive, giving side of people in law enforcement.

"When I first started, there were maybe a half dozen people running, and in 2006 when I took over as liaison for the department, one thing I did was really focus on the team aspect of it," Barnes said.

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Now, anywhere from 35-50 people from the Hillsborough County Dept. of Corrections participate annually as Guardians of the Flame in a leg from Manchester to the New Hampshire Statehouse in Concord. He said this would not be possible without the support of the administration at the Hillsborough County Department of Corrections.

Barnes said there are two main reasons he leads the effort year after year.

“I believe in the cause. I believe that everyone should get the same opportunities to compete without being judged. Second, is my desire to fight the negative perceptions or ignorance when it comes to people with intellectual disabilities as well as the negative stigma that goes along with being a correctional officer,” Barnes said.

This will be Barnes second round of representation at a USA Games event after participating in the Torch Run during the 2006 USA Games in Ames, Iowa.

Barnes also shared a motto that he lives by daily, made famous by Yoda in “The Empire Strikes Back”: **“Try not. Do, or do not. There is no try.”**

REGIONAL COORDINATORS



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Special Olympics Ontario

Special Olympics Appointee
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Special Olympics At-Large
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John Newman
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Mike Anderson
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Jim Reno
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Roberta Abner
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Region VIII
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Ron Casalenda
Wyoming, LETR

Region IX
Western Europe
Jeremy Adams
Ireland, LETR

Region X
Eastern Europe/Eurasia
Jacek Hachulski
Poland, LETR

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Canada
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Paul Manuel

Region XII
East Asia
Patrick Chan
Special Olympics Hong Kong

Region XIII
Caribbean
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