





# **Special Olympics Connecticut Newsletter**

#### **FEBRUARY 2025**

#### Winter Games Presented by Eversource Set For March 1st and 2nd

Winter Games presented by Eversource will take place on Saturday, March 1st and Sunday, March 2nd. During the event, athletes and Unified Sports® partners from our local programs across the state will compete in sports. They'll also participate in Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® and social activities - including a Saturday night dance. Admission to all competition venues is free and open to the public.

Sports and sites will include:

Alpine Skiing and Snowboarding at Powder Ridge Mountain Park & Resort, 99 Powder Hill Road in Middlefield on Saturday and Sunday





Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing at Eversource, 1885 Blue Hills Ext in Windsor on Saturday and Sunday. Dedicated Eversource volunteers have been making and stockpiling "man-made" snow to make races at this location possible.

Figure Skating and Speed Skating at the International Skating Center of Connecticut, 1375 Hop Meadow Street in Simsbury on Saturday

New this year! Floorball at the Pratt & Whitney Hangar, 423 Airport Avenue in East Hartford on Saturday and Sunday

Gymnastics at Farmington Valley Gymnastics and More, LLC, 5 Northwest Drive in Plainville on Sunday

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® offerings at Winter Games will include Special Smiles with volunteers from the UConn School of Dental Medicine and Tunxis Community College at Eversource on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Also, Performance Stations on Saturday from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. and a Hydration Station on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Pratt & Whitney.

In addition to Eversource, event sponsors include:



# Winter Games Platinum Sponsor





#### Gold Sponsors



















## **Silver Sponsor**









### Supporting Sponsors

Farmington Valley Gymnastics & More, LLC International Skating Center of CT Travelers

#### **Contributing Sponsor**

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#### Year-Round Partner Sponsors

















#### Tickets, Tables Available for Annual Awards Dinner on March 25th



Our Annual Awards Dinner, presented by Tokio Marine HCC and hosted by the Calvanese Family, will be held at the Agua Turf on Tuesday, March 25th.

The event will honor outstanding athletes. volunteers, families and groups who exemplify the spirit of Special Olympics and have made a significant impact on the organization.

Tickets are \$35 per guest and must be purchased in advance here. For more information and sponsorship opportunities, email kellib@soct.org or call 203-230-1201.

Emcees will include WFSB's Renee DiNino and NBC Connecticut's Ryan Hanrahan and, in addition to Tokio Marine, Webster Bank is an event sponsor.

The Aqua Turf Club is located at 556 Mulberry Street in Plantsville and doors will open at 5 p.m. The program will take place from 6 to 9 p.m.

#### Honorees will include:

Susan Saint James Leadership Award - The Necci Family Eunice Murtha Award for Philanthropy – Keith Moon Shriver Family Award – The Michaud Family Sheila Schmidt Award - Kevin Fitzgerald Eunice Kennedy Shriver Award - Robin Batchelder Community Leadership Award - Mohegan Tribe

Lew Perkins Coach Award – Amanda Renaud
Outstanding Special Olympics Local Program - Special Olympics North Haven
The Norman Hanenbaum Lifetime Service Award - The Eversource Volunteer Snowmakers

Spirit of Life Awards - Clarissa Enes, Matthew Lengvinis, and Timothy Michaud

Spirit of Inclusion Awards - Bunnell High School, Guilford High School, and Valley Regional High School

*Unsung Hero Awards* - Adam Coletti, Melissa Jacobs, Helen King, Heidi Klein, and The Zoccoli Family

#### Waterbury PAL Teammates Advocate for Special Olympics in Washington, DC







Special Olympics Connecticut was well represented on The Hill during Special Olympics' annual Capitol Hill Day in Washington DC on February 4th.

Unified Sports® teammates Matthew Antonucci and Gabriel Andujar and their coaches Erika Soares and Tammy Allison - all from Special Olympics Waterbury PAL - Matthew's mom Isabel, SOCT Board Member Michael Pendell and SOCT President Mike Mason joined forces to share the power of Special Olympics and their Special Olympics experiences at the Capitol. They also advocated for Federal funding for our health and education programs during meetings with Connecticut legislatures and members of their staff. Sean Wheeler, Director of Strategic Gifts for Special Olympics in DC, and Mary Davis, CEO for Special Olympics International, joined our delegation for select meetings to provide their support.

Upon arrival to DC, members of our group had the opportunity to connect with their peers from across the country. They also trained and prepared for their scheduled meetings. The following day, they met with Representative Joe Courtney and staff members for Senator Richard Blumenthal and Representatives Rosa DeLauro, Jahana Hayes, Jim Himes, and John Larson.

During the meetings, Matthew - an athlete and Global Messenger - shared:

"(Special Olympics) builds confidence, independence and friendships. I've made some good friends through Special Olympics over the years. Healthy Athletes and Unified Champion Schools have a positive impact not only on athletes but on entire communities. If it wasn't for Unified Champion Schools, I wouldn't have been able to play sports in school. I hope to be able to participate in Special Olympics for many years to come."

Gabriel, a Unified Sports® partner and mentor, offered:

"Despite a busy schedule - I'm a senior class president in high school, I'm captain of the baseball team and I work six days a week at the YMCA - I always make time to volunteer because the confidence and growth I've witnessed through Unified Sports is unmatched. Seeing athletes thrive not only in sports but in life, is the best opportunity anyone can be a part of."

Matthew summed up the experience saying, "It was a fun trip meeting athletes from different states and a great opportunity to see Washington DC!"

#### New Board Leaders Announced, Outgoing Members Recognized for Service

Special Olympics Connecticut is pleased to announce that Charlie McLauglin has been named the organization's new Board of Directors Chair.

Charlie is a proven executive business leader, with over 30 years of experience leading Property Casualty, Wealth Management and Group Benefit operations, underwriting, claims, process and portfolio management. In his current role, Charlie leads The Hartford Financial Services Group Personal Lines Property Claims organization.



Charlie joined the Special Olympics Connecticut Board in 2019 and became Vice Chairman and Board Management Chair in January 2023.

Charlie had this to say about his expanded leadership role to Board Chairman: "It's an honor to be part of such an important and impactful organization. The dedication to provide a competitive, healthy, fun and inclusive environment inspired me from my first experience as a food service volunteer at the 2018 Winter Games in Simsbury. I am grateful to work alongside this experienced and invested Board of Directors, highly effective executive leadership team and dedicated staff as we continue to build the future of Special Olympics Connecticut and serve our 6,400 athletes, 1,400 coaches, 3,400 Unified Sports® partners and 5,000 volunteers."



Lisa Kovlakas has stepped up to fill the position of Vice Chair. Lisa, as an ESPN Corporate Citizenship Lead for Strategic Partnerships, designs and implements strategies to highlight ESPN's commitment to using sport for social good. She works to raise awareness of the company's community impact, enhance its reputation, and support its strategic cause partners. By fostering strong relationships with sponsors, NGOs, and key stakeholders, Lisa creates opportunities for content integration, fundraising, grant management, and event activation to drive these initiatives forward.

Lisa started her second term on the SOCT board in 2024, bringing extensive experience to the role. She has dedicated 13 years as an elementary unified coach and previously served as a board member for SOCT. Lisa is often seen volunteering and dancing with athletes at events, showcasing her hands-on involvement. In addition, she manages ESPN's Global Presenting Partnership of Unified Sports with Special Olympics International, reinforcing her deep commitment to the Special Olympics movement.

"I'm truly honored to be serve as Vice Chair of the Special Olympics Connecticut Board of Directors. I'm thrilled to work alongside so many dedicated individuals whose shared goal is to ensure that Special Olympics athletes have equal access to opportunities to showcase their skills, both on and off the playing field. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful impact in their lives."

Outgoing members of the Board, who have demonstrated extraordinary service to Special Olympics during their terms, include immediate past-Chair Matt Necci (in photo below, left) and Chief Paul Melanson (in photo, right).





#### Kritzman, Chute Named to Board of Directors





Special Olympics Connecticut is proud to announce that Deborah Kritzman and Chief Christopher Chute have joined its Board of Directors.

Kritzman has over 20 years of experience in strategic HR leadership, and a proven track record of driving global talent acquisition, fostering high-performance cultures, and implementing innovative people analytics solutions.

Most recently, Kritzman serves as Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Global Atlantic, a KKR company, where she plays a key role in expanding the firm's workforce, optimizing HR operations, and enhancing employee experiences. Her expertise in data-driven decision-making, HR technology, and inclusion strategy has made a lasting impact throughout her career.

Kritzman holds a Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, with a concentration in Discrimination Law and a minor in Psychology. She resides in West Hartford, Connecticut, with her husband, their three daughters—two of whom are freshmen at James Madison University and Ithaca College, while the youngest is a high school junior—as well as two dogs and a cat. Other charities she is passionate about are the Elizabeth Carlson Foundation of the Performing Arts, Connecticut Children's Medical Center and The Hartford Public Library.

Chief Chute has been involved in the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Connecticut since the late '90s.

He is presently the Chief of Police for the Connecticut State Community College System and formerly Chief of Police for the New Britain Police Department.

For Special Olympics Connecticut, he serves as a Co-Director of the Law Enforcement Torch Run Council and created the athlete ambassador program for law enforcement departments and the Guardians of the Flame Association. He has also organized numerous fundraisers for SOCT and represented the organization at International Law Enforcement Torch Run conferences.

Chief Chute holds a Master of Science degree from Central Connecticut State University, where he also works as an adjunct professor.

#### Take the Plunge - Our Athletes are Counting on You!







# PENGÜIN PLÜNGE



Find out more and register for one of our Plunge fundraising events by clicking on an event here:

Shoreline in Groton / March 2nd
Middletown / March 15th
Brookfield / March 22nd
Tolland / March 29th
Monroe / March 29th
Fairfield / April 5th
Do-It-Yourself Plunge / December - April

**NEW!** Learn about our Mobile Penguin Plunge option here.

#### **Noteworthy News**







Friends with Gymnastics Revolution, including members of its Parent's Association, raised over \$11,000 for Special Olympics Connecticut at their Team Challenge event, January 31st to February 2nd.

Our athletes and staff members were delighted to be back at the event again this year to watch the gymnasts perform their routines and greet and thank event attendees for their donations.

Since beginning its partnership with us, Gymnastics Revolution has raised over \$49,000 for our athletes.



Members of the Connecticut Elks Association held a bowling fundraiser for SOCT at Callahan's Bowl-O-Rama on February 1st and invited athletes from our Special Olympics Bristol program to join in all the fun.

After the event, they treated the athletes to lunch at the New Britain Elks Lodge and presented them with an award.



Students at Bacon Academy of Colchester held their own Do It Yourself Penguin Plunge to support our athletes. Teachers and coaches - including Jodi Medlinger (Miss M) and Anna Dipierro - helped organize the event and jumped right into the pool to support their students.



SOCT's Health Messengers came together to participate in a training day where they supported and learned from each other and practiced their leadership and presentation skills. The event was hosted by First Tee Connecticut and took place on February 1st.

Health Messengers inspire their peers to live a healthy lifestyle and educate students and professionals in the medical field about how to treat people with Intellectual disabilities.



Special Olympics Connecticut and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) teamed up to host a New England Mini Conference for Unified Champion School administrators at Foxwoods Resort Casino on January 30th.

Attendees, who represented Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York and Connecticut, met to share their experiences and practices for integrating inclusivity at their schools.



Athletes from our Special Olympics Farmington Valley and West Hartford local programs were thrilled to show off their skills at half-time during a recent afternoon of Men's and Women's basketball at the University of Hartford.

The athletes were enthusiastically cheered on by the UHart players and crowd alike.



Special Olympics Connecticut's Sharon Rozum visited Olsen Construction to thank owner Nick Olsen and members of his team - including Daisy Rook and Michelle Staves - for their support.

Olsen Construction is a generous sponsor of both our Winter and Summer Games.

#### Free Resources to Care for Loved Ones

To show our appreciation for all you've done for Special Olympics Connecticut, we would like to offer you something in return. Something we hope will have a positive impact on you and your family. If you're like many people, creating or updating your will, trust and other important documents is something that often falls to the bottom of the to-do list. But planning can help you care for your loved ones and offer significant peace of mind. And it doesn't have to be complicated.

We hope our **free publications** will help you get started. Some of the information available includes:

- Considerations for taking care of a loved one with special needs, parents or elder family members
- Tips for choosing an executor
- Creating an Advance Care Directive
- Why you need a digital estate plan

You'll find a complete list of free publications **here**.

### **Year-Round Partner Sponsors**



















# **Year-Round Suppliers**

















# **Unified Sports® Sponsors**



















Visit soct.org. Contact us at 203-230-1201 or specialolympicsct@soct.org.

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