

# Triumph



Special Olympics New York • JULY 2003

## Summer Games a Grand Slam

*Athletes "touch 'em all" in Long Island.*

**S**ure, a torrential downpour soaked the athletes on the first day of competition. And day two featured hot and humid weather that left the athletes drenched with sweat. But there's only one way to measure the success of the Special Olympics New York Summer Games at Hofstra University.

"If the athletes are smiling, then it's a successful event," said Neal Johnson, president and chief executive officer of

Special Olympics New York. "And this event is a grand slam."

Nearly 2,800 athletes and coaches participated, and several thousand more fans and family members crowded the stands as athletes competed in Aquatics, Basketball, Bowling, Gymnastics, Powerlifting, Roller Skating, Tennis, Track & Field and Volleyball.

"This is awesome," said former WWF superstar Mick Foley, who dropped in on



SONY Staff

Athletes celebrate on the medal stand.

the June 12 Opening Ceremonies. "It's got the feel of a major sporting event."

Foley, whose father coaches Special Olympics on Long Island, looked on as another wrestler fired up the athletes.

"I want each and every one of you to put your personal stamp on these Games and reach for your personal best," Olympic wrestling champion and Special Olympics

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## Top o' the morning to everyone!

**Editor's Note:** *Immediately following the Summer Games at Hofstra, staff member Jennifer Hazzard led the New York delegation to the World Summer Games in Ireland. She sent the following e-mail upon her return.*

**A**fter spending four days at the New York Summer Games and 15 days in Ireland at the World Games, I am happy to announce that all 27 athletes and seven coaches have returned home from Dublin safe and sound.

On June 11 we came together as strangers, and we returned on June 30 as family.

You cannot understand what I'm feeling until you have experienced it for yourself. I was fortunate enough to attend a few of the awards ceremonies and to see those athletes looking as proud as they could be on the podium. It was "brilliant!" (An Irish term for great.)

Megan Clair (Golf Skills)

stood on that top podium with her shoulders back and her chest out, waiting for the gold. When she was presented with her medal, she pointed out into the crowd to her parents.

It was a scene that I'll never forget.

And when Indiria Upshaw

(Powerlifting) came off the podium after receiving her three bronze medals, she embraced me with a hug that took my breath away and, with tears falling from her eyes, she thanked me for letting her come to the World Games.

And, of course, I won't forget the nine holes of golf I watched in the

pouring rain for silver medalist MaryAnne Silverstrim, or the weight I lost sitting in the brand-new Aquatics facility for Katie Rogan (bronze and silver medals). Oh, and the best part was the Ireland sunburn I got sitting at Athletics with John Woodard. Together we watched Peter Graham and Christian Russo run the 4 X 100m Relay prelims. It was brilliant!

I am proud of each and every one of the athletes for going the extra mile and coming home with the awards to prove it. It was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime trip. Thanks!

*For more stories on the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games, check out [www.specialolympicsnewyork.org](http://www.specialolympicsnewyork.org) or the August issue of Triumph.*



Jennifer Hazzard

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Find up-to-date information on our official Web site, [www.specialolympicsnewyork.org](http://www.specialolympicsnewyork.org) and [www.soshopping.com](http://www.soshopping.com)

# A Message from the President

Neal J. Johnson is President & CEO of Special Olympics New York, Inc.



By now, hopefully, many of you have been made aware of the tremendously successful Special Olympics World Summer Games recently conducted in Dublin, Ireland. For the 27 athletes from New York who represented the U.S.A., and for the 7,000 other athletes from 150 other nations represented, it can be appreciated as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

For the 80,000 people who attended the Opening Ceremonies, in spite of the attendance of many international luminaries, the main focus remained on these 7,000 courageous champions who covered the field of the world famous Croke Park in Dublin.

Those who witnessed the ceremonies will forever be changed by the spirit, joy and enthusiasm of these extraordinary athletes.

While my personal experience of the Games was limited to the Athletics venue, I have some favorite moments that will

remain with me, indelibly etched in my memory and my heart. There was the diminutive young lady from the Ukraine with Down syndrome who, while being escorted from the staging area to the start line for her heat of the 400m run, "played" to the thousand or so spectators in the grandstand with her prancing, waving and most captivating smile. At the start line, however, she clenched her little fists and put on her game face. With absolute determination she awaited the starters' commands. With the gun she was off, not like a shot, but with the resolution that she would be successful. Nearly four minutes later, as she neared the end of the one-lap race, she held that determined look across the finish line to roaring ovation from the entire stadium. After taking a few sips of water, she delighted us all with another grin and animated hand shakes for everyone who wanted one.

There also was the young man from

Egypt who, after both his preliminary and finals in two individual areas and relay, knelt down after the finish line and kissed the track before being deluged by volunteers and supporters.

We should all be proud of Sean O'Rourke. Sean, an accomplished road runner, finished the half-marathon in 1:33, and although not nearly his best time, he encouraged and congratulated all the other competitors in this grueling event. Simply put, Sean demonstrated what all of Special Olympics are about.

The island that is Ireland should be proud of what it achieved for these World Games. The entire nation came out to support this spectacular event. Each and every one of us should take pride in the contributions we make to Special Olympics, here in New York, and around the world.

I sure do! ■

## 2003 Calendar of Events

### JULY

- 14 2003 Summer Golf Classic, Oak Hill, Rochester
- 18 Tennis Invitational, Orange Community College
- 20 Miles for Medals walk, Saratoga Springs
- 26-27 Satins, Silks & Stars Weekend  
Saratoga Springs
- 26 Silks & Stars 5K Run, Saratoga Springs
- 26 Satins, Silks & Stars Gala, Prime Hotel
- 27 Luncheon, Saratoga Race Course
- 28 Long Island Region,  
5th Annual "Tour for Champions" Golf Outing, Northport
- 31 Long Island Region, 4th Annual Summer Concert,  
West Hampton Beach

### AUGUST

- 21 Long Island Region,  
Long Island Golf Outing – Tam O'Shanter CC
- 24 Long Island Region,  
Masthead Cove Yacht Club Sailboat Race, Huntington
- 17-23 Long Island Region, Annual Camp Northstar Week –  
Boy & Girls Harbor, East Hampton

\* For more details, please contact your Director of Field Services or the Special Olympics New York office.

## Triumph

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## Miles for Medals will Provide a Horse's-Eye View of Track

There's sure to be a lot of excitement at Saratoga Race Course this summer, and Special Olympics New York has a way for you to experience some of it before the start of the 2003 racing season: just sign up for "Miles for Medals," a 5K (3.1 miles) walk presented by GE.

This inaugural walk will offer fundraisers a behind-the-scenes look at the famed track before it becomes crowded with bettors.

"We're thrilled that we're able to offer people the opportunity to tour the grounds right before the start of the racing season,"

said Neal J. Johnson, president and chief executive officer of Special Olympics New York.

Miles for Medals participants will begin their jaunt at the entrance of the Saratoga Race Course clubhouse, and they will tour the apron of the track, the grandstand and much more of the track's beautiful grounds.

Additionally, participants who raise and turn in at least \$75 by walk day will receive a Miles for Medals T-shirt. There are additional gifts for those who turn in more donations. ■ JF

## Gold Medal Athlete Ready For 5K

When John Woodard of Queensbury laces up his sneakers on July 26, he'll be preparing to become the first Special Olympics New York athlete to compete in the seventh annual Silks & Satins 5K Run, presented by Price Chopper and GE.

"I'm looking forward to competing in the Silks & Satins 5K Run," said Woodard, a 28-year-old developmentally disabled athlete who runs five to seven miles a day. "I like running because it allows me to push myself to the limit and see what I can do."

At the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games, Woodard definitely tested his limits, capturing a silver medal in the 1,500m run and finishing first in the 3,000m run. At Ireland's Morton Stadium, he clocked a personal best of 13:12.65 seconds in the 3,000m event.

"I went for the gold," said Woodard, who works as a shift manager at the Pizza Hut in Queensbury.

Woodard will go for the gold again at the Silks & Satins 5K Run. ■ JF

## Satins, Silks & Stars Week

**What:** Miles for Medals Walk, presented by GE

**When:** Sunday, July 20 (registration starts at 8:30 a.m., walk starts at 9:30 a.m.)

**Where:** Saratoga Race Course

**Cost:** Participants who raise and turn in at least \$75 by walk day will receive a Miles for Medals T-shirt

**What:** Silks & Satins 5K Run, presented by Price Chopper and GE

**When:** Saturday, July 26 (registration starts at 6 a.m., race starts at 8 a.m.)

**Where:** East Avenue and George Street in Saratoga Springs

**Cost:** \$18 before July 21, \$23 on race day

**What:** Hot Saratoga Nights Black-Tie Gala, presented by GE

**When:** 7:30 p.m., Saturday, July 26

**Where:** Prime Hotel in Saratoga Springs

**Cost:** \$185 per person

**What:** Equestrian Demonstration, featuring celebrities and Special Olympics athletes

**When:** 10 a.m., Sunday, July 27

**Where:** Paddock, Saratoga Race Course

**Cost:** Free with admission to the race course

**What:** Meet the Stars

**When:** 11 a.m., Sunday, July 27

**Where:** Paddock, Saratoga Race Course

**Cost:** Free with admission to the race course

**What:** Cool Sunday Mornings Gourmet Luncheon, presented by GE

**When:** 12:30 p.m., Sunday, July 27

**Where:** At the Rail Pavilion, Saratoga Race Course

**Cost:** \$85 per person

For more information or to register for any of the events listed above, visit [specialolympicsnewyork.org](http://specialolympicsnewyork.org) or call 518-388-0793. ■

## Tonight's Winning Numbers Are ...

Imagine tuning into WTEN for the New York Lottery's NUMBERS and WIN 4 drawings and hearing someone say: "Good evening, I'm NOT Yolanda Vega."

Well, thanks to a silent auction item that will be up for bid at the Hot Saratoga Nights Black-Tie Gala, it could happen – just this once. New York



Yolanda Vega at a Special Olympics event.

Lottery has donated a prize called "Be Yolanda Vega for a Day."

The winner of "Be Yolanda Vega for a Day" will appear on television with Vega, part of New York Lottery's Draw Team, on August 22 as she announces the lottery drawings. The drawings will be broadcast live from the New York State Fair.

"Special Olympics is near and dear to my heart," Vega said. "Whenever I'm with the athletes, I feel the love emanating from them." ■ JF

**"Being involved in Special Olympics has been one of the greatest things in our childrens' lives. They've grown so much and they've gained so much confidence."**

– Cathy Searing, mother of gold medal swimmers Dan and Amy Searing

## Images from Summer Games



Swimmers drive toward the finish.



First Church of God youth ministry.

## From Indiana to New York, With Love for All

**T**hink your trip to the 2003 Special Olympics New York Summer Games at Long Island's Hofstra University was long? Try making the drive from New Albany, Indiana.

"It was fun," said 17-year-old Brea Dennison, one of 27 parishioners from Indiana's First Church of God who endured the 15-hour ride. "Of course, I slept most of the way."

R.W. Moody, the First Church of God's 27-year-old youth pastor, organizes a long-distance summer ministry trip each year.

"One thing we talk about is learning to accept people no matter who they are," Moody said.

With that philosophy in mind, Moody volunteered the First Church of God's youth ministry for the 2003 Special Olympics New York Summer Games. To prepare, his group organized fund-raising efforts, and they worked with a Special Olympics program in Indiana.

In New York, the group visited several tourist attractions. After that, though, they spent countless hours at Hofstra and other venues, setting up for gymnastics events and braving the rain and humidity to work with Track & Field competitors.

"The athletes told me we were celebrities for being here," said a sunburned Dennison at Closing Ceremonies. "They're the celebrities, though. We came to see them, and they've changed the way I think about sports. From now on, when I play soccer, I'm going to stop afterwards and tell people, 'Hey, you did good. You played a great game.'"

"The Special Olympics athletes have taught us to accept and love every person," Moody said. ■ JF



It's a tight race as they take the turn.



A Powerlifter pumps out the reps.



A gold-medal moment.



Neal Johnson and Tony Bifaro admire Teddy Schwytzer's "special" haircut.

Photos by  
Miller Photography & SONY Staff

Continued from P.1

honorary coach Jeff Blatnick implored. "Tomorrow, do your best. I want you to put soul in it."

After igniting the Special Olympics Cauldron with fellow Long Island athlete Sandra Forde, that's exactly what Sean O'Rourke did, running the 3,000m in 11:27, a personal best. He also was part of a delegation of 34 athletes and coaches that left for the World Games in Ireland immediately following the Summer Games.

"I'm very impressed with the intensity that Special Olympics athletes compete with," said Tom Parrotta, head coach of Hofstra University's men's basketball team. "They get what sports are about."

So records were broken, medals were won and worn with pride, but most importantly, the Special Olympics athletes had fun. Their smiles proved that.

On the final day of competition, Onondaga County swimmer Larry E. Jackson, Jr. used a smooth stride to win several gold medals. Afterwards, with a wide grin on his face, he summed up the Special Olympics experience:

"It's a learning experience every time I come out to a Special Olympics event," he said. "I love to see people trying to excel. And even if they don't win, they're still smiling. That's the most important thing I've learned this weekend: winning is not everything." ■ JF

**"Words can't describe what I'm feeling. You see the warmest and happiest people. I don't know what to say. I get a lot more out of volunteering than the athletes do, believe me."**

— Kevin Halpin, volunteer, NYC



Dominick Totino

Sean O'Rourke and Sandra Forde, left, light the Cauldron to start the Games.

**The Summer Games were presented by UBS** and sponsored by: **Statewide Gold:** New York Lottery and Cingular Wireless; **Gold:** Fraternal Order of Police, GEICO, OppenheimerFunds and the Security Traders Association of New York; **Silver:** Insignia/ESG; **Bronze:** Federation of New York Insurance Professionals, GoldmanSachs and New York Sports Clubs; **Media:** Cablevision, Anton Newspapers, The Herald Community Newspapers, KJOY and WLIR.

## Chairman of the Board Honored

**A**nthony J. Bifaro, chairman of the Board of Directors for Special Olympics New York and assistant to New York State United Teachers president Thomas Y. Hobart Jr., was recently honored with the 2003 Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

Peggy Stephens Barmore, assistant to the President for NYSUT, also received the 2003 Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

"Clearly, Peggy Barmore and Tony Bifaro embody the American experience," President Hobart said. "Not only have they built extraordinary careers, but they've also dedicated themselves to helping others. They've given so much back to the community."



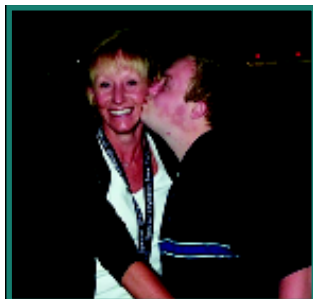
Tony Bifaro

Bifaro is the son of an Italian immigrant mother. In addition to his work with Special Olympics New York, he serves on the boards of United Way New York State, United Way of Northeastern New York and the Mohawk Pathways Girl Scout Council. He also is vice president of the Italian American Labor Council. ■ JF

## Coaching Provides a Life Lesson for Debi Whelan

**L**ike so many Special Olympics volunteers and coaches, Debi Whelan of Babylon realized during her first event that her involvement was good for others. And for herself.

"I was working as a high school swimming official when someone asked me to volunteer at an event, about seven years ago," said Whelan, who was named 2002 Volunteer of the Year for the Long Island Region. "The thing I noticed right away was that Special Olympics athletes are thrilled just to do the best they can. They're just happy to be competing. And that provided a great change of pace for me; as



Debi Whelan and a happy athlete.

a high school official, I was around athletes who got worked up if their time was one-tenth of a second slower than they thought it should be. So I love working with Special Olympics athletes."

While Special Olympics volunteers are notoriously dedicated, Whelan took her dedication to an extreme.

During the past seven years, Whelan has rearranged her life in an effort to balance her own love of sports with coaching. A marathoner and a triathlete – Whelan has completed the

New York City Marathon in 4 hours, 20 minutes – she coaches three sports: Floor

Hockey, Skiing, and Track & Field. Her Track & Field squad, the Babylon Bobcats, won about 30 medals at the 2003 Special Olympics Summer Games at Hofstra University.

Perhaps more impressive than her coaching efforts, though, is the fact that she left her career as an interior designer to spend even more time with Special Olympics New York. She is now an assistant program director for the Long Island office of Special Olympics New York.

"Some people are afraid to get involved with Special Olympics," Whelan said. "They don't know what to expect. But I loved it right away. My athletes make me look at the world differently. They have so much fun, and that makes it fun for me, too." ■ JF

## Around the State

### Staten Island

Frank Debetta of Great Kills was honored in June for being among the best of Staten Island's youth. The Staten Island Community Board's 10th annual Youth Awards Dinner honored 24 local high school students.

Debetta, a Special Olympics New York athlete, received an award for his success in overcoming steep hurdles in his life.

All recipients were given a framed certificate and a \$100 savings bond from the board, and certificates of merit from elected officials.

### Clinton County

The New York State Police Troop B recently raised more than \$2,400 to support Special Olympics. In May the annual "Cops at the Block" fund-raiser featured a crew of police officers that were not only helping to raise money, but who also worked as waiters and waitresses at the event.

Pamela Boudreau and Melissa McDonald, both Special Olympics New York Global Messengers, spoke at the luncheon.

### Westchester-Putnam Counties

Cyclists got on their bikes this June in Putnam County and they pedaled on until they had reached Vermont, raising \$250,000 for Special Olympics New York and the Westchester Putnam ARC.

The Tour de Wagner is a three-day event that requires each cyclist raise at least \$2,000. Many riders go above and beyond the requirement. It started as one man raising \$10,000 and has grown. This year, 71 people took part.

### Genesee County

The annual Walking Together For Down Syndrome and Special Olympics Annual Fun Walk was held in Batavia this June. Money raised is divided between The Down Syndrome Parent Support Group of Genesee County, Inc. and the Genesee Region Insurance Professionals, which uses its money for Special Olympics New York and scholarships.

### Chautauqua County

Last fall, four members of the Fredonia Speech Pathology and Audiology Society (SPAS) provided hearing tests for Special Olympics New York competitors at a sectional competition in Albany. But their support did not stop there. SPAS recently raised more than \$1,700 to help the four athletes from their area travel to 2003 World Summer Games in Dublin, Ireland.

SPAS sold paper shamrocks for \$1 a piece to help Jennifer Yost, Kristine Fuller, Melissa Kestler and Pamela Robbins travel to Ireland. All four Jamestown athletes returned home with medals from the World Games.

Please call, fax or e-mail your area or regional information to Jeff Foley at: 518-388-0793, Fax: 518-388-0795, jfoley@nyso.org

## Michelin Man Tirelessly Supports Special Olympics USA

As part of Michelin North America's \$250,000 commitment to Special Olympics USA, Michelin Man bobblehead dolls can be purchased this summer online for a retail price of \$22 (including shipping). Special Olympics USA will receive a \$5 donation for each doll sold.

The bobblehead promotion will run until July 31 and the dolls can be purchased at [www.michelinman.com](http://www.michelinman.com).



## Million Dollar Duck Could Make a Million Dollar Dream Come True

How will you spend it? The \$1 million, that is, when you win the Million Dollar Duck Race?

Will you buy a house? A new car? Will you take a dream vacation?

All of the above? You'd better give it some thought, because you could become a millionaire on Sept. 17. That's when the Million Dollar Duck Race is held at the South Street Seaport in Manhattan.

The Million Dollar Duck Race is an event where 20,000 "adopted" rubber ducks are dumped into the East River, just south of the Brooklyn Bridge. They race under Pier 17 to the Seaport as hundreds of onlookers cheer.

The parent – or owner – of the winning duck could win anything from two round-trip airline tickets, courtesy of American Airlines, to a Club Med vacation or even \$1 million.

The Million Dollar Duck Race is sponsored by the New York Lottery, Cingular Wireless, OppenheimerFunds and Merrill Lynch. Media sponsors are the *Daily News*, Time Warner Cable, WABC-TV, Radio Disney and *Financial Times*.

*Ducks are \$5 each. Special discounts are available for bulk and group purchases. For more information, contact Chris Grieco at 212-661-3963 or [cgrieco@nyso.org](mailto:cgrieco@nyso.org), or visit [www.specialolympicsnewyork.org](http://www.specialolympicsnewyork.org).* ■ JS

### You Could Win:

#### Grand Prize

■ Two American Airlines round-trip tickets to anywhere in the continental U.S. or Caribbean

#### First Prize

■ A four-day, three-night Club Med vacation for two

#### Second Prize

■ Nationwide wireless service with a free phone for one year from Cingular Wireless

#### Third Prize

■ A one-year membership to New York Sports Clubs

#### Fourth Prize

■ A 32-inch Panasonic television

#### Fifth Prize

■ An Olympus digital camera

#### Sixth Prize

■ An Amtrak vacation package for two to Niagara Falls, hotel included

#### Top Individual Fund-raiser

■ Two American Airlines round-trip tickets to anywhere in the continental U.S. or Caribbean

#### Top Team Captain

■ Two American Airlines round-trip tickets to anywhere in the continental U.S. or Caribbean

## Point of View

By Jeff Foley

Here's a riddle: How do you get a guy who hasn't spilled tears in a decade to cry like a baby?

Answer: Have him work at the Special Olympics New York Summer Games.

Wow, what a time to start as Public Relations director for Special Olympics New York! I came on board a week before it was time to pack up and head to Hofstra University. No big deal, though, I figured. As a former sportswriter and college sports information director, I've taken my share of road trips.

How different could Summer Games be?

Stupid question, right? What I didn't plan on was the athletes. I've never met such a wonderful group of people. And I have never seen anything as moving as Summer Games in my life.

On the first day of competition, I worked the track and field events for eight hours. I was freezing as I looked for story ideas and set up media interviews, but time flew by.

That day, I called my wife.

"Tina," I said, "my coworkers could be difficult to work with (disclaimer: they're great people and hard, accommodating workers), and taking the job with Special Olympics would still be the right move. These athletes would make anything worthwhile."

See, I'd never been to a Special Olympics event prior to Summer Games. My contact with people with mental retardation or developmental disabilities has been limited. I had a cousin who had Down syndrome when I was a teenager (Michael was a beautiful little guy, but he passed away much too young) and I spent one day with Chris Burke (the actor with Down syndrome who played Corkie on "Life Goes On"). But trust me, that's not nearly enough preparation for the Summer Games experience.

How do you prepare for the high-fives and smiles you get when you walk through the stands? How do you anticipate the sportsmanship that you see? How do you prepare for what I call "leaky eye infection?"

I had to excuse myself from conversations time and time again. I'm a guy, so I'm supposed to be tough. I couldn't let people see me cry.

Eventually, I gave up, though. (But it's still not crying. It's leaky eye infection.)

I'm sure you'll agree with this statement: Special Olympics athletes are beautiful people. I can't tell you how many times I watched them stop to help a fallen athlete. Or slow up to let a friend finish near them. Or cheer for a straggler with so much passion that it was like they were competing, too. They are wonderful to be around.



I can tell you how many times I saw an athlete complain. Or curse. Or shove somebody. Or make an excuse.

Zero times on all of the above. And that's wonderful, too.

One Summer Games moment in particular stands out for me: A parent of a swimmer told me that when her son was born, doctors suggested she give him up because he wasn't going to be able to do anything in life. She said she wanted to invite every doctor who's ever said that to a parent to Summer Games, so they could see ability in action.

I second that idea. And while the doctors are at Summer Games, discovering exactly how wrong their prognoses were, could they also take a look at my eyes?

*Point of View is written periodically. Jeff Foley is Public Relations director for Special Olympics New York and he's looking forward to hearing your story ideas. Contact Jeff at 518-388-0793 x109, or at jfoley@nyso.org.*

## Letters

**Editor's Note:** The following was submitted by Syracuse University student Sarah King, who performed a summer internship at Special Olympics New York.

I volunteered for Special Olympics on and off throughout most of my years in high school and middle school. My dad has been very involved as a volunteer for a number of years and he often brought me to events and fund-raisers. He has worked hard for the organization, but he always said it was worth it. Worth what, I wondered more than once.

While I volunteered occasionally, I did not attend a competition until I was out of high school. When I was around volunteers, I often heard that the competitions were different – that what the



athletes did was, to be clichéd, "special." I hadn't been to a competition, but considering the amount of time I spent doing things involving the organization, I thought I understood how special it was. I don't think I got it until recently.

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to complete a public relations internship with Special Olympics New York. PR is my major so I jumped at the chance. Looking back, though, I had no idea what I was jumping into.

I began my work with Special

Olympics in early May. When I arrived, I found a busy office with a very hard-working, dedicated staff. It was not long before the state Summer Games at Hofstra University, so the activity in the office never stopped.

Before I knew how long I'd been there, Summer Games came. It wasn't until Opening Ceremonies that I began to understand why Special Olympics New York has nearly 30,000 volunteers and such dedicated staff members who love their work. That night, nearly 2,000 athletes poured into Hofstra Arena one delegation at a time; they were so excited they were doing back flips ... in one case, literally!

*Continued on P. 8*



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## Letters *(continued from P. 7)*

Throughout the course of the Games, I was able to see several competitions and meet many athletes. I was truly impressed, admittedly even a little surprised, by just how talented some of the competitors were. But even more impressive than the talent was the pride the athletes had for their achievements, whether they won a gold medal, set a personal record, or maybe even just jumped in the pool to swim the race. Whatever the individual accomplishment, every athlete there had a reason to hold their head just a little higher.

The Special Olympics athletes are proud. They are not proud solely because they can win events and get medals, but they are proud because they are athletes and they know what it means to be dedicated to something, to compete and to succeed.

If you have spent any time with people who have worked with Special Olympics, you have undoubtedly heard the phrase, "it will change you." You've heard about the sportsmanship and the excitement, the courage of the athletes and their love for their sports. I heard it, but I didn't understand it until I saw it.

I saw what makes these competitions so "special;" it is they way they touch everyone who participates. You can't just be a spectator here. The athletes' enthusiasm alone is enough to draw you in. Their motivation, hard work and sincerity are enough to make you stay.



Sarah King, right, at the Aquatics competition.

Mission: To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-style sports for children and adults with mental retardation, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.