

Triumph



Special Olympics New York • MARCH 2002

Winter Games
Highlights pages 4-5

Now He's Truly a Global Messenger

Brooklyn athlete Rodney Hankins is selected as an SOI spokesman along with 11 other athletes from around the world.

Brooklyn athlete Rodney Hankins, who has amazed the public with his athletic ability and his stirring oratory, has been selected by Special Olympics, Inc. (SOI) to represent athletes across the world as a Sargent Shriver Global Messenger.

Hankins, 40, becomes the first Special Olympics New York athlete to earn the distinction and



Rodney Hankins delivers a speech during an SOI event in New York City.

joins 11 other athletes from as far away as India and South Africa in the Global Messenger Class of 2002-2003.

"This is a tremendous honor," Hankins said from his job in the accounting office of ABC-TV in Manhattan. "I always dreamt of something like this. I just hope I can help out in any way I can. I hope I can make an impact for the athletes, especially."

Global Messengers, who are selected every two years by Washington, D.C.-based SOI, serve as ambassadors of the movement, attending conferences, special events and competitions around the world. Global Messengers have met world leaders, dined at the White House and addressed the European Union. They have toured China and South Africa as part of a mission to introduce Special Olympics to these nations, and they have attended ceremonies in Greece to light the Special Olympics Flame of Hope.

"Special Olympics, Inc. has done an

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Restructuring Moving Ahead

Field directors build the foundation for transition.

The transition toward a full restructuring of Special Olympic New York took several giant leaps forward in recent weeks, with the announcement of the inaugural Region and with the launch of an aggressive, statewide fact-finding mission by the field staff.

Directors of field services have been dispatched to the newly identified Regions to measure such things as economic stability, potential for growth and the possible expansion of the competition schedule. The field directors, in concert with the current Area leadership, will recommend committee structures for the Region.

This needs assessment comes on the heels of the recent announcement that Long Island – made up of Nassau and Suffolk counties – will become Special Olympics New York's first Region by the third quarter

of the year.

Before the new Long Island Region begins operating, the foundation will be set across the state for other Regions to follow suit.

"Basically I am acting as a conduit between the Central office and the field," said Ruby Gary, director of field services in Section 1, which includes New York City and Long Island. "I'm collecting pertinent information from the Area programs about the community, such as economic profiles, the political and business structures and related information to help ensure the long-term success and stability of the Regions."

While the majority of the state has been re-mapped from Sections to Regions, it is unclear how the boroughs of New York City will be apportioned under the restructuring – or Regionalization, as it's being called.



**Special Olympics
New York, Inc.**
in it together

Other Sections of the state will likely be ready sooner to switch to a Regional configuration.

"I really believe that Section 4, which consists of the Southern Tier and much of Central New York, is ripe for success," said Erin Griffiths, director of field services. "The overall attitude is that everyone recognizes that this restructuring needs to happen. We want to make sure that the existing successes are sustained through the transition, and at the same time build a plan to maximize the quality and quantity of training and reaching out to new volunteers, athletes, sponsors and supporters." ■

What's

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Find up-to-date information on our official Web site, www.specialolympicsnewyork.org.

A Message from the President

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



When you think about what is at the root of sport, and what defines and exemplifies the human spirit, there isn't really much difference between the Olympics and Special Olympics.

I know I bring a bias to this notion, but I've always believed it.

This point was made again as I watched the competitions in Salt Lake City, and then compared them to the events that took place in Syracuse in February, where our Winter Games were held.

Olympic champions repeatedly describe the sacrifices they make to become champions. They talk about the isolation of training, the doubts that cross their minds as they strive for Olympic glory and the risks of putting their hearts and souls on the line as they chase their dreams.

Special Olympics athletes are similarly challenged. They are challenged by their coaches to learn their sports and do their best. When they have done their best, they are asked to improve even more. Special Olympics athletes also face prejudice from a society that has not yet fully embraced people with mental retardation and the dreams they have.

When the competition is complete, and the athletes step up onto the awards stand, whether they are hearing their country's anthem or the cheers from family members or fellow athletes, they feel pride. They are overwhelmed with joy and satisfaction.

Picabo Street, the champion downhill skier who finished out of medal contention in Salt Lake, appeared happier than ever as she paused after her race and accepted the echoing cheers from more than 10,000 spectators. She had recovered from a terrible knee injury to make the Olympic team. To her, it didn't matter that she had not earned a medal. It only mattered that she had honored her sport and the Olympic tradition by doing her best.

Our honorary coach, Jeff Blatnick, who overcame two bouts of cancer to win gold in 1984, faced a room full of reporters in January and recalled how he is always asked to discuss the difference between Olympic athletes and Special Olympics athletes.

There is no difference, he said. Individuals, regardless of their abilities, must overcome the same challenges, whether they are physical, mental or emotional, as they train, compete and strive for their goals. He concluded: The champion emerges when the athlete accepts and overcomes those challenges.

Jeff knows. Picabo Street knows. The Floor Hockey team from Manhattan knows. Every athlete in Salt Lake City – or even the Salt City of Syracuse – knows. ■

2 Special Olympics New York

2002 Calendar of Events

March

Cops & Lobsters all month

- 9 Sections 3 & 4 Bowling (under 21) competition, Clifton Park Bowl, Clifton Park
- 10 LETR Polar Plunge 2, Fishkill

Also scheduled during March, with dates to be confirmed:

- Training schools – Scheduled as needed throughout the year *

April

Cops & Lobsters all month

- 7 NYSOPBA Run Through the Pines 5K, Saratoga Spa State Park, Saratoga Springs
- 13 Section 3 Aquatics/Basketball, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs
- 14 Section 1 & 2 Volleyball & Aquatics, St. Johns University, Queens, NY
- 19-26 15th Anniversary Special Olympics Greece Invitational, Athens
- 20 Section 1 Basketball/Aquatics, Fordham University, Bronx
- 20 Section 4 Aquatics/Basketball, SUNY at Oswego
- 21 Section 2 Basketball/Aquatics, Marist College, Poughkeepsie
- 24-27 NYSUT Convention, NY Hilton Hotel, Manhattan
- 27 Section 5 Basketball, New York Chiropractic College, Seneca Falls

Also scheduled during April, with dates to be confirmed:

- Area Coordinators' Council meeting *
- Training schools – Scheduled as needed throughout the year *

In the Next Issue

- Athletes head to Greece
- Rodney Hankins Goes to L.A.
- Planning begins for Metro Tournament

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

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Inspire Greatness

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Rochester Plunge Draws 250

Unseasonably warm weather didn't warm up Lake Ontario.



SONY Staff

Two-hundred-fifty men, women and children waited patiently on the banks of Lake Ontario, but when the whistle sounded they sprinted into the bitter 37-degree water. This was the scene of the second annual Polar Plunge at the Ontario Beach Park in Rochester. The Plunge was part of the Law Enforcement Torch Run to benefit Special Olympics New York.

While the temperature was unseasonably warm. But if the look of horror that came over some plungers faces was any indication, the water was still freezing. Many of the participants came in costumes including two men in hula skirts, wigs and coconut bikinis.

“This is not only one of our most successful events, but it surely ranks as one of the most enjoyable as well,” said Special Olympics New York Torch Run Liaison Jeanne Mesick. “Western New York law enforcement, Sgt. Sal Gerbino of Gates Police Department in particular, does a phenomenal job in putting on this event. This year’s event raised just over \$25,000.”

Be sure to check out next month’s Triumph for pictures of the March 10 Polar Plunge that took place in Poughkeepsie. For more information on Law Enforcement Torch Run events, call Mesick at 518-388-0790. ■

Cops and Lobsters Returns to New York

Law enforcement officers ready to wait tables for Special Olympics.

The state’s law enforcement community has begun trading in their uniforms for serving trays, and are taking the oath to “serve” and protect to a new level as they begin the annual Cops & Lobsters fund-raising initiative throughout the state this month.

More than 20 Red Lobster restaurants from across New York, and more than 600 nationally, will allow officers to wait tables for donations in the form of tips, with all proceeds going to Special Olympics.



Last year, thousands of officers participated in Cops & Lobsters events held at nearly 600 Red Lobster restaurants in the U.S. and Canada, raising a record \$1.2 million. Red Lobster patrons in New York donated nearly \$50,000 during last year’s promotion.

For more information, please call Jeanne Mesick, 518-388-0790, x106, or visit www.specialolympicsnewyork.org. ■

Nationwide Recycling Program To Benefit Special Olympics

Corporate Express, Inc. will lead inkjet-cartridge recycling effort.

Corporate Express, Inc., a Colorado-based office and computer products supplier, has launched a nationwide inkjet-cartridge recycling program designed to benefit the environment and generate funds for Special Olympics.

Through the program, Corporate Express is encouraging its customers and Special Olympics supporters to mail used inkjet cartridges to its Colorado headquarters. The company will donate to Special Olympics 50 percent of the proceeds, up to \$1.25, for individual cartridges mailed in, and up to \$2 for bulk donations. The program began March 1. The goal is to raise a minimum of \$250,000 for Special Olympic USA this year.

“We are committed to supporting local communities and organizations that enhance the lives of individuals. Special Olympics is that type of organization,” said Van Hindes, vice president of communications.

The inkjet cartridges can be shipped via a postage-paid self-mailer or via a collection bin at any Corporate Express customer site. All businesses are eligible to participate in the program. Non-Corporate Express customers may call 888-CE-TODAY, or visit www.corporateexpress.com. Only cartridges in recyclable condition are accepted. Epson cartridges are not eligible.

Corporate Express, a Buhrmann company, is the world’s largest business-to-business supplier of office and computer products.

For more information, call Rita Cox, director of Development, at 800-836-6976, or e-mail rcox@nyso.org. ■

Around the State

Area 3 – Westchester & Putnam Counties

Jerry Peters, executive director of Special Olympics New York – Westchester/Putnam, served as Grand Marshal of the 13th Annual St. Patrick's Parade in Peekskill on March 9. As Grand Marshal, Peters presided over all the activities celebrating St. Patrick's season in Peekskill and the surrounding areas.

Area 6 – Ulster County

A number of world champion powerlifters competed at the Beast of the Northeast Bench and Deadlift Wars at The Diamond Zone/Gold's Gym in the Town of Ulster. The competition served as a fund-raiser for Ulster County's Special Olympics program and organizers hope to make it a yearly event. The \$30 entry fee for each lifter was donated in full to Special Olympics.

Area 10 – Greene County

Hudson Valley Insurance Professionals held its annual bowl-a-thon to benefit Special Olympics on March 2 at Catskill Hoe Bowl Lanes.

Area 15 – Chemung, Schuyler & Steuben Counties

The Second Annual Wine Tasting to Benefit Special Olympics was held at the Hornell Knights of Columbus on Jan. 18. Anthony's Fine Wine and Spirits of Hornell sponsored the event. There were 19 tables with more than 150 different wines for sampling.

Area 28 – Madison County

Madison County held its 12th Annual Craft Show on March 2 at Oneida High School.

Area 29 – Oswego County

The 15th Annual Softball in the Snow tournament was held at Oswego High School on Feb. 16. Twelve teams took part in the tournament, which raised \$2,000. A team that included players from New Jersey and as far away as Texas won the championship game. Cam's New York Pizzeria was the primary sponsor of the event.

Please call, fax or e-mail your Area information to Doreen Hand, 212-661-3963, Fax: 212-661-4658, dhand@nyso.org



Rodney Hankins- Global Messenger

Continued from p. 1

outstanding job in selecting Rodney Hankins as one of its representatives to spread the message of the Special Olympics movement throughout the world," said Neal J. Johnson, president and chief executive officer of Special Olympics New York.

"He is an outstanding and dedicated athlete who has the sincerity and polish to be a great Global Messenger. He will make his family, community and fellow athletes very proud."

Hankins, who has excelled in Track & Field at many competitive levels, has participated in Special Olympics since he was 8 years old. He has competed in Floor Hockey and Gymnastics, and continues to compete regularly in Bowling.

"Rodney is not only a great competitor but an inspiration to other Special Olympics athletes because he has worked very hard to get where he is both as an athlete and as an individual," said coach Julie Rebenstock of Special Olympics New York – Nassau County, who served as a coach for Team New York at the 1999 World Summer Games.

Hankins upholds a strict diet and exercise regimen, training several times a week on the road and in the gym. He has earned medals at all levels of Special Olympics competition, including Silvers and Golds at the 1995 and 1999 World Summer Games. He has participated in non-Special Olympics track events, such as the 1996 Paralympic Trials in Atlanta, the 1998 Goodwill Games Special Olympics exhibition races, the Penn Relays and the Millrose Games.

One of his most memorable moments, he said, came at the 1998 Goodwill Games when he warmed up with Olympic sprinter

Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

"As a Global Messenger, I would like to focus on the recruitment and training of coaches, the overall training and fitness of athletes, and helping to make sure that

athletes serve on the boards of directors of their programs," Hankins said. "I would like to see Special Olympics athletes compete one day in the Olympic Games, and not just in exhibitions."

The Global Messenger Program began in 1983 as Athletes for Outreach, when Colorado athlete Greg Mark was asked to join his Area Outreach Committee as an athlete recruiter. In less than six weeks he recruited 30 adults with mental retarda-

tion to join Special Olympics.

The goal of today's Global Messenger Program, which is a component of the comprehensive Athlete Leadership Program (ALPs), is for athletes to speak for themselves about issues that are important to them, and encourage support and participation from volunteers, coaches, other athletes, sponsors and others. It was thought that too often, individuals with mental retardation are not given the chance to speak; they are spoken for, or about.

Hankins, who also serves as a Special Olympics New York Global Messenger, will receive training by SOI and meet the Class of 2002-2003 in Los Angeles in March. Following three days of intense training, the athletes will attend the 20th Anniversary Premiere of the movie "E.T. – The Extra-Terrestrial."

This is so exciting," he said. "I never thought it would happen. I feel like that kid in the candy store." ■



SONY Staff

Hankins regularly competes at Area, sectional and state level competitions throughout the year.

The Class of 2002-2003

- Tamana Chona – India
- Chan Tim Lei – Macao
- Rodney Hankins – New York
- Jack Hess – Canada
- Erin Holloway – Colorado
- Paul Marretti – Virginia
- Katie Meade – Iowa
- Alvaro Miranda – Peru
- Ephraim Molohkane – South Africa
- Maysaa Sandakly – Lebanon
- Serena Silvi – Italy
- Leonid Stroilin – Russia

The Sam Dawson Story

By Timothy P. Shriver, Ph.D.

Once in a while an extraordinary movie comes along, defying everyone's expectations of what great drama is all about. "I Am Sam" is such a movie. But don't be deceived: This is not a film about Sam Dawson, a "retarded" man with a "mental age" of 7 and "autistic tendencies." "I Am Sam" is about you.

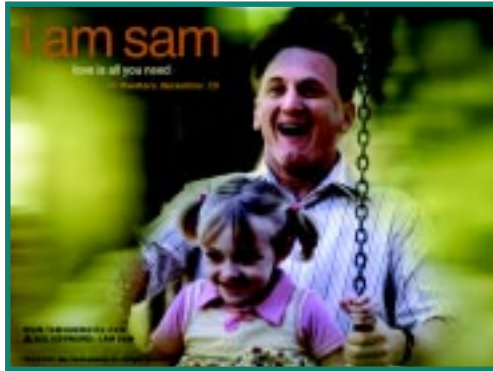
Here's the question "I Am Sam" poses: What matters most to you in your life? And here's why it's a tough question: The characters of Sam Dawson and his high-powered lawyer, Rita Harrison, can make you very uncomfortable with whatever answers you're been living with.

There's a catch. In order to experience the depth of the question, you have to get over Sam's disability, and that's where some viewers might miss the message. Many people might not know what to make of a movie where a person with a mental disability gets under their skin.

Of course, it's understandable that some viewers might be uncomfortable. It's understandable because people with mental challenges are the most neglected and misunderstood people in the world. They are still institutionalized, denied medical care, denied education and denied respect. They are usually lonely, mostly unemployed, sometimes ridiculed and regularly left out. A mother of a special child once told me that her greatest fear was that no one would come to her son's birthday party. She was willing to fight for her son, but she couldn't fight the fear that no one cared.

All of that may be understandable, but it's wrong. It's wrong because there

are 170 million people in the world with mental retardation who, despite obvious challenges, have gifts that can and should be seen, heard and understood. There are more than 6 million people with mental disabilities in the United States alone, and for them, "mental age" is a narrow assessment of their humanity, and "disability" is a one-dimensional label for their capabilities.



The great gift of "I Am Sam" is that it reveals the totality of Sam Dawson. He is, in Tom Wolfe's words, "a man in full," and if you pay close attention to him, he challenges every precon-

ception you have of mental "disability." That's not to say the film is sugar-coated. Sam struggles with significant limitations in a way that is both painful and difficult. But as he struggles, he reveals not just his brokenness but his wisdom too, the wisdom that the world too often dismisses and overlooks. The limitations are there, but there is also a rebellion against the way things are. And there are some things that are wrong to Sam that may be more wrong to you than you ever thought.

Is he deeply confused when cross-examined by prosecutors? He is. But there is a raw intelligence in his anger at a legal system that debates the life of a child in an adversarial proceeding dripping with gamesmanship.

Does he struggle with reading? He does. But there is disarming wisdom in his coping strategy: He gains comfort with material he can master and uses it to "read"

bedtime stories to the child he loves with all his heart.

Is he anxious in new settings and when he experiences changes in his routine? He is. But

there is an honest and self-protective design to his stress management: He sticks to environments and social groups where he is welcomed, valued and comfortable.

Does Sam struggle with self-doubt, insecurity and anxiety about his future and the future of his daughter? He does. But after you watch this movie, you will too. You will struggle not because you will worry about job security, rent payments or social status but because you will wonder whether you love your family, your friends and the people you cherish enough to make life worth living.

At the end of "I Am Sam," 7-year-old Lucy scores a goal in a soccer game, and Sam is the referee. Because of his "disability," he violates every social norm, runs to his daughter, grabs her in an exuberant hug and cheers as loudly as he can: "Lucy scored a goal! Lucy scored a goal!"

I hope you don't miss that moment. Because of his "disability," Sam broke the rules: He didn't know the score; he interrupted play; and he showed shameless bias in favor of his own child. But at that moment, Sam Dawson, a person with "mental retardation," "autistic tendencies" and a "mental age" of 7, knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to celebrate the joy of life — his beautiful daughter's life and his own.

Those are Sam Dawson's priorities. As you watch the movie and realize who Sam is, you may find yourself revisiting yours. ■



*Special Olympics
President and CEO
Tim Shriver*

March is National Mental Retardation Awareness Month

Mental Retardation affects more than seven million Americans and their families. The month of March has been declared Mental Retardation Awareness Month in order to promote public awareness and enhance the world's understanding of the issues affecting people with mental retardation.

It is a month in which more people will begin to recognize the abilities of people with mental retardation rather than their disabilities.

This month, organizations such as Special Olympics urge all citizens to give full support to efforts that strive to give people with mental retardation to live full and productive lives of inclusion in our communities. ■



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State Staff Changes

- Congratulations to Vice President of Finance Alys Rickert who was married on Feb. 2. She has changed her last name and is now Alys Prostack.
- Jeff Countois was recently promoted to director of field services for Section 2. Countois was previously the sectional sports director.
- Filling the sectional sports director position, effective March 4, is Jennifer Whipple. Whipple has been a Special Olympics coach with Area 9 for five years. ■

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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.