

March 2015

# Newsletter

Special  
Olympics  
Iowa



## Special Olympics to Unite the USA in the First-Ever Unified Relay Across America

Special Olympics and Michelle Kwan announced on ABC's Good Morning America Jan. 27 that registration is open for the first-ever Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America. Special Olympics Iowa athlete Corey Leonhard (Muscatine) has been named the Central Route Co-Captain, helping to kick off the relay in Washington, D.C. and following its progress to the Opening Ceremony in Los Angeles.



**Corey Leonhard**  
**Unified Relay Co-Captain**

Leonhard is a 28-year Special Olympics veteran, competing in numerous sports which currently include flag football, golf, bowling and bocce. He has been a Global Messenger and was the athlete representative on the Special Olympics Iowa Board of Directors.

The Unified Relay will give anyone in the country a chance to carry the Flame of Hope that will be lit in Athens, Greece and help deliver it to Los Angeles for the Special Olympics World Games. Over the course of 46 days, in a hand-to-hand exchange, over 20,000 participants will run, walk or bike a segment of the relay in this team and individual fundraising event as it passes through all 50 states. The relay will be in Iowa from June 12-14, covering 213 miles with overnight stays in Des Moines and Ames.

Supporters will have the opportunity to run with the Flame of Hope by signing up as an individual torchbearer or as a team of torchbearers for a half-mile walk or run segment or a five-mile bike segment. Participants can find out more information and sign up for the Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America at [www.unifiedrelay.org](http://www.unifiedrelay.org).

The U.S. portion of the Unified Relay will begin on May 26, where it will be split into three simultaneous routes starting in Augusta, Maine; Miami, Florida; and Washington, D.C. Traveling west, all three routes will become unified in Los Angeles on July 10. Along each route, welcoming ceremonies and community celebrations will take place nightly with musical performances, celebrity guests and Unified Sports Experiences. The relay will culminate at the Opening Ceremony of the Los Angeles 2015 Special Olympics World Games on July 25, 2015.

"The flame of the torch is inspirational, in a way that few symbols can match. And I'm thrilled to be part of the announcement of what promises to be the greatest and biggest Torch Run in United States history," said Michelle Kwan, Olympic figure-skating legend, Special Olympics International Board Member and relay co-captain. "A run that will not only touch every state in the Union, every corner of this country but also engage and inspire every American. The Unified Relay Across America is going to unify the entire world in one giant celebration of the spirit of Special Olympics."

**YOU can carry the Flame of Hope  
in the Unified Relay Across America!  
For more information and to register,  
visit [www.unifiedrelay.org](http://www.unifiedrelay.org).**

# Mid-Winter Tournament Expands Locations for 2015

Special Olympics Iowa announced new partnerships with Iowa City West High School and Iowa Gym-Nest as it expands locations for the annual Mid-Winter Tournament March 13-14 in Iowa City. The University of Iowa will remain as host for the more than 1,000 athletes and Unified Sports partners registered for the tournament.

Powerlifting and team basketball (3-on-3 and 5-on-5) competitions remain at the University of Iowa Field House, while Iowa Gym-Nest will host artistic and rhythmic gymnastics and Iowa City West High School will host cheerleading, dance and basketball skills. Competition begins at 9 a.m. March 14 and a Healthy Athletes session will be held from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at Iowa City West High School.

The Opening Ceremony will take place March 13 at 6 p.m. along with a banquet and dance at the Coralville Marriott Exhibit Hall. Tickets are required to attend the banquet.

“The Mid-Winter Tournament brings together athletes and Unified Sports partners from 133 delegations across the state as they compete in the inclusive atmosphere Special Olympics creates,” said SOIA Vice President of Sports Operations and Program Shane Kiesner. “The additional venues will allow us more space for competitions, providing a better experience for all involved. A shuttle will be available between venues so athletes, families, volunteers and fans can experience all competitions at the tournament.”

Special Olympics Unified Sports is an initiative that combines equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and athletes without intellectual disabilities (called partners) on sports teams for training and competition. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

Sponsors for the 2015 Mid-Winter Tournament include Collins Community Credit Union, ACT and Toyota of Iowa City

The tournament is open to the public and admission is free. For more information on Special Olympics Iowa, visit our website at [www.soiowa.org](http://www.soiowa.org) or call 515-986-5520.

## Tentative Schedule of Events

### Friday, March 13

- 3 p.m. Delegation Registration (Marriott Exhibit Hall)
- 6 p.m. Opening Ceremony and Banquet (Marriott Exhibit Hall)
- 7-8:30 p.m. Dance (Marriott Exhibit Hall)

### Saturday, March 14 - Breakfast provided at each hotel

- 7 a.m. Delegation Registration (UI Field House and Iowa City West HS)
- 8-8:30 a.m. Powerlifting Check-In (Room 515 at UI Field House)
- 8:30-9 a.m. Powerlifting Warm-ups (Room 515 at UI Field House)
- 9 a.m. 3-on-3 Basketball Competition (Main Deck – UI Field House)
- 9 a.m. 5-on-5 Basketball Competition (South Gym – UI Field House)
- 9 a.m. Powerlifting Competition (Room 515 – UI Field House)
- 9 a.m. Cheer Yell Competition (Iowa City West HS)
- 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Healthy Athletes (Iowa City West HS)
- 9:45 a.m. Basketball Skills (Iowa City West HS)
- 12:30 p.m. Dance Competition (Iowa City West HS)
- 12:30 p.m. Gymnastics Warm-ups (Iowa Gym-Nest)
- 1 p.m. Gymnastics Competition (Iowa Gym-Nest)

## Gymnastics Reinstated for Mid-Winter Tournament

Special Olympics Iowa has decided, after further review and discussion, to reinstate gymnastics competition as part of the Mid-Winter Tournament for 2015.

Due to the low number of athletes currently training and competing in gymnastics our staff will be conducting a review over the course of the next year to determine the competition status of gymnastics for 2016 and beyond using a soon to be defined set of criteria for the addition or removal of sports from state competition status.

This review process document, when completed, will be available to all delegations for their review via our website and will apply not only to gymnastics, but to all sports offered by Special Olympics Iowa.

# From Event Volunteer to Area Director, Theresa Werner Gives Back to Special Olympics

by Sarah Mauch

Theresa Werner became involved in Special Olympics when she took a teaching job with Vinton-Shellsburg School District in 2000. She began coaching the Vinton-Shellsburg Special Olympics team and stayed with the team for about eight years.

Her daughter, Nikkole, inspired her to volunteer. Nikkole competed in wheelchair events for the Vinton-Shellsburg team and now competes with Cedar Rapids Rec as an adult. Werner's youngest daughter, Brittney, has also volunteered with Special Olympics for 13 years, helping coach at area events.

Werner was the East Central Area Director from August 2012 to November 2014. One of her favorite parts of Special Olympics is the athletes. She loves how they give 100% and also cheer on their fellow team mates and athletes. Seeing the athlete's smiles make her day and give her joy.

Her favorite event to volunteer at is track and field because the day includes so many activities for the



**SOIA Central Area Director Theresa Werner with athlete Ryan Lane at Summer Games**

athletes. It allows athletes to compete in two events and a relay. The competitions get pretty intense, but the relay is her favorite to watch.

As an area director Werner set up events for aquatics, track and field, basketball skills and bowling. In her many years of volunteering, she has coached track and field, basketball, cheerleading and bowling. She has also volunteered at softball and participated in the polar plunges.

"I enjoy volunteering for Special Olympics because of the athletes, coaches, state staff, volunteers and families," Werner said. "I have met so many wonderful people."

She also loves how it trains athletes for competition and teaches sportsmanship, seeing so many athletes form friendships through Special Olympics. Werner and her family look forward to many more years of volunteering and being involved with Special Olympics.

## Iowa Law Enforcement Half Marathon Set for April 19

Come get your run on at the 2015 Iowa State Patrol Half Marathon on Sunday, April 19! Runners and walkers of all skill levels are invited to participate in the half marathon, which also includes a 10k and 5k.



For more information and to register visit [www.soiowa.org/marathon](http://www.soiowa.org/marathon). Discounted registration fees are available for participants who sign up early!

## PULL for Special Olympics Iowa!

The Rasmussen Group Presents the second annual Plane Pull benefitting Special Olympics Iowa. Get your team of 20 members together and pull a UPS aircraft weighing more than 120,000 pounds!



For more information and to get registered, visit [www.soiowa.org/planepull](http://www.soiowa.org/planepull).



# FIT Focus: Training and Nutrition Fuel Kyler's Success

By Carla Pakenas

Kyler Prunty has been a Special Olympics Iowa athlete for almost 20 years and shows no signs of stopping any time soon. His good sportsmanship and positive attitude in and out of competition has earned him the nickname "Smiles," and he wears it well.

Last month at Winter Games in Dubuque, Kyler placed fourth in the giant slalom and fifth in slalom skiing in his extremely competitive division. He says that downhill skiing is one of his favorite Special Olympics events and with help from other athletes he has started to see the benefit of using poles to get a faster time on the hill.

His favorite part of Winter Games was the pool party at the hotel on the last night, after his skiing events were finished because he got to hang out and dance with his best friends.

Kyler joined Special Olympics when he was in third grade and enjoys participating year-round in basket-

ball skills, skiing, swimming, softball and track, with swimming and downhill skiing as his two favorite sports. Kyler contributes a lot of his success to the advice that he receives from his teammates and friends in Special Olympics. He shares that they are always motivating each other to improve during practice and competition and like to exchange ideas in the time they have together. Kyler describes the atmosphere as, "competitive but still friendly" because at the end of the day it is all about having fun.

When he is not at a practice or competition, Kyler works hard at the BR Miller Middle School cafeteria in Marshalltown. He is fortunate to receive a free, balanced lunch every day from the school which helps to keep his nutrition on track and encourages him to eat healthy foods on his own. He likes to exercise at home on his elliptical and has plans to add a Bowflex machine soon.

He has recently started Special Olympics cheerleading because the event is always looking for



**Kyler Prunty (left) with his brother, Kenard, at Winter Games**

men to support the stunts and he was interested in trying something new. He is excited to perform "Grease" at this year's Mid-Winter tournament in Iowa City for his first cheerleading competition.

Kyler and his family are very thankful for the Special Olympics Iowa organization and all of the opportunities it has given them over the years to stay active and meet lifelong friends. Kyler says, "Special Olympics is family to me. We are all family when we do activities together."

## Do Your Part to Spread the Word March 3



Spread the Word to End the Word is an ongoing effort by Special Olympics, Best Buddies and our supporters to inspire respect and acceptance through raising the consciousness of society about the R-word and how hurtful words and disrespect can be toward people with intellectual disabilities.

The campaign, created by youth, is intended to engage schools, organizations and communities to rally and pledge their support at [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) and to promote the inclusion and acceptance of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Join Special Olympics Iowa and Best Buddies Iowa for awareness day at the Iowa State Capitol:

Tuesday, March 3

9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Iowa State Capitol Building, First Floor Rotunda

Visit [www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org) to learn how you can Spread the Word to End the Word.

## FASTSIGNS Joins SOIA Movement as a Silver Level Sponsor

Special Olympics Iowa is committed to creating consistent, prominent and well-recognized branding across Iowa and beyond. As part of our strategic plan, we are in the process of creating fresh, new marketing materials for all of our programs, events and competitions statewide. To be a good steward of our resources, we reached out to FASTSIGNS to explore a partnership that will help us make strides in maximizing our brand presence.

In 2015, FASTSIGNS has agreed to become a Silver Level Sponsor, and will generously donate a series of much-needed SOIA and partnership banners supporting a broad range of efforts.

FASTSIGNS is a worldwide company that provides visual communications solutions to help companies and organizations solve challenges, tell stories and increase visibility. Steve Smith, the owner of the local franchise in Clive, Iowa, has been coordinating with SOIA to determine how to best meet the needs of our organization and ensure brand integrity.

Check out the FASTSIGNS website at [www.fastsigns.com/42](http://www.fastsigns.com/42) to see the wide range of services they provide!

**FASTSIGNS**  
More than fast. More than signs.™

## Concussion Training for Coaches

The Special Olympics U.S. Risk Management and Insurance Task Force has created a concussion awareness and safety recognition policy that must be implemented by all U.S. programs. The policy was created to insure the health and safety of all Special Olympics participants. In addition, insurance requirements and state law have driven many sport organizations to implement concussion management policies.



All coaches are now required to complete one of the following FREE online concussion awareness training courses:

- The Center for Disease Control's "Heads-Up Concussion in Youth Sports" training course, available at [http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/online\\_training.html](http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/online_training.html)
- National Federation of State High School Association's "Concussion in Sports" training course, available at <http://nfhslearn.com/courses/38000>

**Concussion awareness training must be completed by all coaches at least once every three years.** The concussion training can count for sport re-certification!

Upon completion of the online concussion training, coaches are to send the Certificate of Completion by mail or email to:

Rhonda Schwarzkopf ([rschwarzkopf@soiowa.org](mailto:rschwarzkopf@soiowa.org))  
Special Olympics Iowa  
PO Box 620  
Grimes, IA 50111

The online trainings will help all coaches understand a concussion and the potential consequences of the injury, recognize concussion signs and symptoms and how to respond, learn about steps for returning to activity after a concussion and focus on prevention and preparedness to help keep athletes safe season to season.

Please contact Rhonda Schwarzkopf with any questions at 515-986-5520 or [rschwarzkopf@soiowa.org](mailto:rschwarzkopf@soiowa.org).

## Des Moines Polar Plunge Moves to Jordan Creek Town Center in 2015

Special Olympics Iowa and Jordan Creek Town Center have announced a new partnership that will bring the Des Moines area Polar Plunge to Jordan Creek Town Center on Saturday, November 7, 2015.

The Polar Plunge is a signature fundraiser for Special Olympics and offers a unique opportunity for individuals and organizations to raise money and support Special Olympics Iowa athletes by plunging into frigid waters.

"We are excited to be able to partner with Jordan Creek Town Center and see this great event unite our surrounding communities, and the families who live within them, for a day of fun," said Special Olympics Iowa President and CEO Gary Harms. "The location and amenities are a perfect combination to give our plungers, fans, families and Special Olympics athletes a fantastic experience while braving icy waters to support individuals with intellectual disabilities."

The Polar Plunge will take place at Jordan Creek Town Center with festivities beginning at noon. Plungers, fans, families and athletes will witness the fun in the freezing waters while enjoying a wide variety of family-friendly activities.

"We are very excited to partner with Special Olympics Iowa in 2015," said Jordan Creek Town Center General Manager Randy Tennison. "We welcome the community to come out and experience this first-time-to-Jordan Creek event and support Special Olympics Iowa."

There is a way for everyone to be involved – plunge solo, plunge as a team, toss your boss, sponsor an individual or team, the corporate challenge or volunteer at the event. If you are too chicken to plunge, you can register to raise funds and receive a t-shirt and other prizes.

Registration and further details about the event will be available soon. Please visit [www.soiowa.org](http://www.soiowa.org) for updates.

## Polar Plungers Across the State are Freezin' for a Reason

2014 proved to be another successful year of Polar Plunges and we couldn't be more thankful for the sponsors, donors, team members and volunteers that contributed, raised money and sacrificed their time.

Together we have raised nearly \$350,000 for Iowa athletes, giving them opportunities to participate in year-round sports, health and educational programming — and most importantly — experience joy, pride and respect.

Support Special Olympics Iowa by joining the fun of the Polar Plunge in 2015. In addition to our existing Polar Plunge locations, we are excited to announce that new for 2015 we will be hosting a plunge in Ottumwa! Gather your team and register for a Polar Plunge near you - It's the Coolest Thing You'll Do All Year!

March 21	Council Bluffs, Lake Manawa
March 28	Ames Greek Plunge, State Gym
March 28	Ottumwa, Jimmy Jones Shelter
April 11	Cedar Rapids, Pleasant Creek
April 11	Iowa City, Coralville Lake
April 17	Iowa City Greek Plunge, Coralville Lake
April 18	Cedar Falls/Waterloo, George Wyth
April 25	Northwest Iowa, Scharnberg Park

For more information and to register, visit:  
[www.soiowa.org/plunge](http://www.soiowa.org/plunge)



# Special Olympics Iowa Calendar of Events

## March

3	Spread the Word to End the Word	Des Moines, State Capitol Building
5	Young Athletes Play Day	West Des Moines
7	Southeast Area Aquatics	Ottumwa
8	Northeast Area Spring Games & Aquatics	Cedar Falls
14	Mid-Winter Tournament	University of Iowa, Iowa City
21	Council Bluffs Polar Plunge	Lake Manawa
28	East Central Area Aquatics	Cedar Rapids
28	Challenge Day	Des Moines
28	Unified Sports Day	Avoca
28	Ames Greek Polar Plunge	Iowa State University
28	Ottumwa Polar Plunge	Ottumwa Jimmy John's Shelter
31	North Area Aquatics	Spirit Lake

## April

4	Unified Sports Day	Grinnell
7	West Central Area Aquatics & Spring Games	Indianola (2 locations)
9	North Central Area Spring Games	Fort Dodge
9	Young Athletes Play Day	Cedar Rapids
11	Area Spring Games	Marshalltown, Cedar Rapids, Eldridge Sioux Center, Lamoni, Mt. Pleasant
11	Challenge Day	Cedar Falls
11	Cedar Rapids Polar Plunge	Pleasant Creek
11	Iowa City Polar Plunge	Iowa City, Coralville Lake
14	North Area Spring Games	Spirit Lake
14	Southwest Area Spring Games	Council Bluffs
16	Young Athletes Play Day	Ankeny
18	Cedar Falls/Waterloo Polar Plunge	George Wyth State Park
25	Northwest Iowa Polar Plunge	Scharnberg Park

## May

7	Unified Sports Day	Drake University, Des Moines
16	Gourmet Gala (fundraiser - call to register)	Seasons at Iowa State University, Ames
21-23	Summer Games	Iowa State University, Ames

## June

13	Challenge Day	Lake City
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## August

8	State Softball	Ankeny
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## Connect With Us!

Remember to follow Special Olympics Iowa to receive important updates and stay on top of the latest events and activities.

### Be Our Twitter Reporter!

Training for a competition? Volunteering at an event? Having a great time at a fundraiser? Let us know about it! Tag your tweets with @soiowa and we will retweet you!



Facebook at [www.facebook.com/SpecialOlympicsIA](http://www.facebook.com/SpecialOlympicsIA)

Twitter at @SOIowa

Instagram at [www.instagram.com/SpecialOlympicsIA](http://www.instagram.com/SpecialOlympicsIA)

YouTube at [www.youtube.com/soiowa2](http://www.youtube.com/soiowa2)



# Special Olympics Iowa

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## Thank You to Our Partners!

### Champion Statewide Partners



### Premier Statewide Partners



Champion and Premier Statewide Partners provide a comprehensive level of support of all programs and services offered by Special Olympics Iowa (SOIA). Organizations may be recognized at these levels for financial support, in-kind donations or any combination thereof, and are recognized in many other ways. To find out more about our current partnership opportunities or for information on how to become one, visit our website at [www.soiowa.org](http://www.soiowa.org) and look under Support Us, or contact the SOIA Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations Cindy Schaffer at 515-986-5520.