



Special Olympics Ontario London

The Birthplace of Special Olympics

Athlete Newsletter Autumn 2009

Special Olympics Ontario London a Finalist for Pillar Community Innovation Award

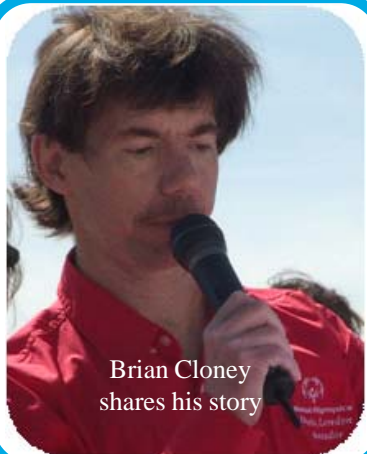
If it seems even more people than usual are talking about Special Olympics London, it's for good reason: the local organization is a finalist for the 2009 Pillar Community Innovation Awards. Special Olympics London is one of just 3 organizations short-listed for the Community Innovation Award. The winner will be announced at the annual Pillar Awards Gala on November 12.

The new speakers program is the brainchild of former Special Olympics London co-chair, Dennis Bordin and current treasurer, Bill Mills. "We began the program because we knew the organizers for the 2010 Special Olympics Canada Summer Games would need to call on our athletes to help promote the games. We wanted to be sure we had a group of athletes who would be ready," says Mills.

Six London athletes now serve as ambassadors in this unique program. Alison Lang, Brian Cloney, Jamie Walker, Scott Mitchell, Scott Tenant and Valerie Nyhout have all received training in the art of writing and delivering speeches and will soon also receive training in how to speak with the media. The fearless six have already fanned out through the community giving speeches to groups ranging from elementary and secondary school students to police cadets, and from service clubs to the London Knights and other golfers at the recent London Knights golf tournament.



Alison Lang speaks
to students at
TD Waterhouse Stadium



Brian Cloney
shares his story

As organizers for the 2010 Special Olympics Games Summer Games gear up to host the games here in London, it looks as though the group is about to get even busier. "I have had the privilege of working with London's athlete ambassadors as we prepare for the Games," says Inspector Steve Goodine of the London Police Service and Volunteer Director of Fundraising and Sponsorship for the 2010 Special Olympics Canada Summer Games. "These athletes have volunteered their time to attend promotional events and educational opportunities to reinforce the importance of Special Olympics to athletes with intellectual disabilities. Their experiences and stories have enlightened others about Special Olympics and their important message has also emphasized Special Olympics athletes are great citizens and contribute immensely to our communities."

As finalists for the Pillar Awards, Special Olympics London has been able to share the story of the ambassadors - and the amazing job they are doing - with even more people. "Articulate, Amazing, Inspiring, these are words that can best describe the outstanding work and efforts of our Ambassador athletes," says Dennis Bordin. "After weeks of training when they delivered their first speeches it was unbelievable the incredible brilliance of those speeches and their confidence and passion for Special Olympics. We all can learn from their work efforts and dedication that success is achievable at all levels," he said.

Special Olympics London is honoured to be a finalist for the Pillar Innovation Award and is honoured to be represented by six inspiring, dedicated athletes. Adds Inspector Goodine, "I have received many positive comments about the London athlete ambassadors and Special Olympics and the common message has been, Special Olympics represents the intended value of sports, both physically and socially." That's a message the athlete ambassadors are proud to share.

London prepares to host the 12th Special Olympics Canada Summer Games



The Games Organizing Committee for the Special Olympics Canada Summer Games is hard at work planning the games which will take place July 11 to 17, 2010. More than 1,400 athletes, coaches, and mission staff, representing all 10 provinces and Yukon and Northwest Territories, are expected to come to London for this seven-day sporting event. The athletes will compete in eight official sports including athletics, five- and ten-pin bowling, powerlifting, rhythmic gymnastics, soccer, softball, and swimming. These Games will also serve as the qualifying event for athletes to become members of the national team that will compete at the 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Greece.

Competitions will be held in venues across the city, including at the University of Western Ontario, a site that holds historical significance, as much of Dr. Frank Hayden's research into the benefits of sports for individuals with an intellectual disability was conducted there, and Dr. Hayden's research played a significant role in the creation of Special Olympics. Additional sporting venues include Stronach Community Recreation Centre, Fleetway Bowling Centre, Canada Games Aquatic Centre and TD Waterhouse Stadium.

"The Games Organizing Committee is very excited to host this event" said General Manager, Jeremy Renaud. He added, "London is the perfect host city because of our historical connection to Special Olympics, and we have all the right ingredients to make this a truly memorable event, but more importantly we have the people who are dedicated to make this an athlete-centered, technically efficient program, which will leave a long lasting legacy."

Athletes, families and coaches can keep on top of activities related to the 2010 Games through its Facebook site "2010 Special Olympics Canada Summer Games London Ontario." The Games' official website, london2010.ca, is expected to launch mid November of this year. The site will provide up-to-date information for athletes and their families and fans, coaches and the media. There will also be e-commerce, links to social media including Twitter and YouTube videos, and athlete blogs. Videos of events and real-time event results will be posted during the week the Games take place.

The Games Organizing Committee is led by three chairpersons: Dianne Cunningham, Chief Murray Faulkner, and Dr. Darwin Semotiuk. Ms. Cunningham is the director of The Lawrence National Centre for Policy and Management at the Richard Ivey School of Business; Chief Faulkner is head of the London Police Service; and Dr. Semotiuk is a professor of kinesiology in the Faculty of Health Sciences at The University of Western Ontario.

....a note from Brett Girard

As basketball athletes already know, Coach and Manager Brett Girard has taken a job in Toronto and will no longer be a part of the London program. Still thinking about the London athletes though, he wanted to pass on this message: "I hope everyone had safe and happy summers and are now ready to play some BBall. It is with great pleasure that I introduce two familiar names as the new head coaches of Basketball. Andrew Shantz will be the new head coach of the "C" team while Alex Heisz will be taking over for the 'D' team. I will be coaching in Toronto so hopefully if we meet at a tournament you will take it easy on my new team. Good luck this season and have fun!"



Brett will be missed by basketball coaches and athletes and all are grateful to him for starting up the London basketball program.



Coach Profile: Michelle Durst

When Coach Michelle Durst first walked onto the Special Olympics soccer fields over four years ago, she wasn't sure what to expect. Fortunately, it only took a short time for her to figure that out. She has now come to expect warmth, appreciation and friendship every Tuesday soccer night and that keeps her coming back.



Coach Michelle, helping Francesca with sunscreen

The Seaforth native first began coaching when she was an undergraduate student at the University of Western Ontario. She almost began as a coach for the ski race team until a scheduling conflict prevented that. Instead, the soccer athletes gained a valuable and committed coach. Michelle grew up playing soccer and has always loved the sport. Through late high school and university she played in a women's only league and now plays in an intramural one.

But it isn't just the love of the sport that has Michelle hooked on Special Olympics. "I cannot think of anywhere else where you are appreciated this much," she begins. "The athletes are a great group of people." Her first tournament was in

Hamilton two summers ago. Many will remember that as the tournament where hospital trips seemed to be the norm but when asked about her experience there, Michelle doesn't bring up the fact that she sat up all night at the hospital with one of the athletes. Instead she focuses on what a rewarding experience that first tournament turned out to be. "We knew pretty early on that we wouldn't be taking home a gold medal," she explains "but everyone was still having a blast and playing as a team. I learned a lot that weekend about making the sport about having fun." She believes that has a lot to do with the whole coaching team who put an emphasis on having fun and on fair play. "The bond with the other coaches is very special as well," she adds. "After all, you come to this with the same values and the same goals – to see everyone have fun and do their best."

Michelle recently coached the 'D' team at the Provincial games in Windsor. She loved the experience of the entire event from the games themselves to the opening ceremonies, the closing ceremonies and all the activities that are a part of such a weekend. "You feed off the energy," she shares. "It's such a high."

Even better than the experience of the Provincial Games though, Michelle says for her the best moment so far was the Regionals held here in London last year. "It was a great experience, after 2 or 3 years of practice seeing these athletes playing together as a group and really soaring – for me, that was the point of no return. I mean, that was when I knew I would always be connected with Special Olympics."

Michelle is currently a graduate student doing research in the area of diabetes and plans to make medical school her next step. Asked if she has any advice for potential Special Olympics volunteers she is quick to respond. "Absolutely – if you're thinking of coaching just go out and try it. I've already learned so much and all the while I'm having a great time with some wonderful friends."



Coach Michelle, offering advice to Paul

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Rob Wilson

Which sports do you play?
 Soccer, basketball, baseball, and skiing.
 Used to do swimming, track and floor hockey
 Where do you work?
 The John Labatt Centre
 What other activities do you enjoy?
 Anything and everything
 Favourite food?
 Chicken wings, pizza and pasta
 Favourite sports team?
 Edmonton Oilers but I like watching them all
 Favourite music?
 Anything but opera or country
 If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?
 Australia
 Nickname?
 Crazy Legs
 Pets?
 Two dogs named Tia and Chimo
 Favourite Tim Horton's treat?
 Bagel and a chocolate milk or pop
 Favourite Special Olympics memory?
 The Opening Ceremonies at the Provincial Games in Windsor.



Which sports do you play?
 Basketball, Track and Field and Soccer
 Where do you work?
 At a daycare centre
 What other activities do you enjoy?
 George Bray hockey, downhill skiing and travel
 Favourite sports team?
 Toronto Maple Leafs, Toronto Blue Jays and London Knights
 Favourite music?

Barbara Deluce



Shania Twain
 Favourite movie?
 Home Alone: Lost in New York
 Best vacation?
 New York City, where I saw all the places in that movie
 If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?
 Las Vegas
 Pets?
 Yorkshire Terrier named Bruno
 Favourite Tim Horton's treat?
 Café Mocha
 Favourite Special Olympics memory?
 A gold medal win in the 4x400 M relay at the Provincial Games in Sault Ste. Marie

about athletes you may know