

**Special
Olympics**
Maryland



IMPACT

January 2016

Greetings Marilyn,

I first met Special Olympics Maryland athlete Justin Hunsinger this fall at a soccer tournament at the Severn school. His team had just won their game and he was having a fun day. I also got to meet Justin's dad, Dan who coaches for the Montgomery County Program. In speaking with both Justin and Dan they demonstrated a pure passion for sport as they described how much they enjoyed competing. As much as they wanted to win the underlying driver for both was the sheer joy that comes from competing against other athletes in a quality environment. Dan pointed out the importance of Special Olympics sport experiences providing the same attributes of any high quality non-Special Olympics sport experience. Justin also happened to mention that he was looking forward to basketball. He shared that he loved the Maryland Terrapins men's basketball team and that he had met Coach Turgeon.

So when Justin's mom, Kitty got word that we were organizing a basketball clinic with the University of Maryland Men's Basketball team, she responded quickly to register Justin who was among 40 Special Olympics Maryland athletes hosted by Coach Turgeon and the Maryland Terrapins Men's Basketball team on January 14th. Remember the team had just experienced a tough loss on the road to the University of Michigan and were preparing to face Ohio State. They practiced from 5:00 – 6:15 and then they welcomed our athletes onto the floor of the Xfinity Center.

Coach Turgeon greeted each athlete, including Justin, as they made their way onto the court. And then, after Coach Turgeon publicly welcomed everyone, SOMD athlete Michael Heup opened the clinic with heartfelt thank you to Coach and the team before joining his fellow athletes for a 40 minute clinic at three stations (dribbling, shooting, rebounding). The clinic was followed by unified games where two Terps players teamed up with three of our athletes to play two 10 minute halves. At the conclusion of the two hour session the Maryland players gave each athlete a basketball and "Go Terps" placard as a keepsake from the experience. The players then

ATHLETE of the MONTH

Phillip Shepard (pictured in green)



Hometown: Mt. Airy, MD

Joined Special Olympics: 2002

Sports: Skiing, Basketball, Softball, Soccer, Floor Hockey and Golf

Excited about: the upcoming Winter Games in February

Wants you to know: He loves painting and he's writing a book about his life so people will know the challenges he has faced.

Video link: [click here to meet Phillip and hear his message](#)

stayed and signed autographs and thanked our athletes for coming out. When I asked Justin about the evening, he replied, "It was awesome... a dream come true." That summed it up for the other 39 athletes who shared similar sentiments as they left the court. And that could have been the end of the story but Coach Turgeon demonstrated his commitment to our athletes after the clinic in two very public forums. If you're a Terps fan you know that Coach does his weekly show on Thursdays. The show starts at 7:00. On January 14th Coach was late for his show because he was still at the Xfinity Center. When he arrived he shared his thoughts about Special Olympics and the clinic with host, Johnny Holliday. [Here is a link to the Special Olympic clip where Coach Turgeon talks about the basketball clinic during the Radio Show.](#)

And then on Saturday, January 16th after 35 point win over Ohio State Coach joined Johnny again for a post-game interview. When asked to what he attributed the team's comeback win after the Michigan loss on Tuesday, Coach Turgeon referred to a really good practice on Thursday followed two great hours with Special Olympics Maryland athletes during the clinic they hosted. [Click here to listen to the audio of coach's post-game comments](#)

The entire experience speaks to the transformative power of our athletes. It speaks to the respect bestowed upon our athletes by coach Turgeon, his staff and his players...it represents the best of what it means to be Champions Together. [Please click here for a video summary of the evening produced by the University of Maryland athletic department](#)



#PlayUnified,

James C. Schmutz
President and CEO

PS – And by the way, we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Maryland State Police Polar Bear Plunge on January 30th. You too can join our efforts to be Champions Together and support athletes like Justin and Michael by joining a team, forming a team or supporting a plunger. Go to PlungeMD.com to learn more about how to take part in what has become a Maryland Tradition.

Upcoming Events

Competitions/Events:

- Statewide training is taking place in preparation for Winter Games which includes Alpine Skiing and Snow Shoe

Special Events:

- [Corporate Plunge](#): Sandy Point State Park 1/29/16
- [Police/Military/Firefighter Plunge](#): Sandy Point State Park 1/29/16
- [20th Annual MSP Polar Bear Plunge](#): Sandy Point State Park 1/30/16
- [Cool Schools Challenge](#): Sandy Point State Park **MOVED TO FEB. 3rd!**

Ben Takes the Plunge for the 20th Year in a Row to Support the Program He Loves

MYTH: There is no cure for cabin fever caused by blizzards like we just experienced.

FACT: There is a great cure for cabin fever – it's called the **Maryland State Police Polar Bear Plunge** – so join a team or recruit your friends to create a



Ben Collins epitomizes dedication, loyalty and perseverance. Whatever he starts he sees through to the end and sticks with it for a long time. In a world that is ever changing and constantly moving Ben is a rock. He is steady, unwavering and sure about his direction.

Ben thinks the Plunge is important because "It helps raise money for people with intellectual disabilities so athletes don't have to pay to train and compete in sports. Which is one of the founding principles Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver started the organization with. [Click here to support Ben as he makes the plunge again this year.](#)

Dedication: Born in and raised in Rockville, MD Ben attended Rock Terrace High School where he was first introduced to Special Olympics Maryland in 1980. He has been an athlete ever since. Competing in a variety of sports over the years including Bowling, Cross Country Skiing, Golf, Middle Distance Running, Snowshoe and Swimming. At 49 years old Ben shows little sign of slowing down though he has most recently narrowed his focus to just three sports throughout the year. Bocce, Powerlifting and Sailing. One of Ben's highlights in his long athletic career has been attending the 2014 Special Olympics USA Gams in Princeton, NJ as a Bocce athlete.

Loyalty: Ben has shown equal longevity in his employment at Special Olympics International in Washington DC. He has been an employee there for the past 24 years. His most recent position and role is that of Administrative Assistant Marketing and

team and come out to Sandy Point State Park on Saturday , January 30th to Plunge. The second best cure is to support a Plunger. Either way it will warm your soul and cure your cabin fever. The water and weather will be great...hope to see you there!

It's not too late to register for the Plunge or support someone you know (or just the event on its own)



We're celebrating our 20th Anniversary of this Maryland tradition. You can support athletes like [Ben Collins](#) and teams like [Team ChickaBella](#), or you can register to plunge and/or join a team on your own. It's up to you and [it's only a click away!](#)

Communications Department. Ben takes the metro back and forth to work every day using a folding cane because he is legally blind. As he shared "I can only see shadows and shapes. But I really rely on picking up sounds and voice."

Perseverance: Ben has been a plunger for the past 19 years and in 2016 he will celebrate his 20th Plunge just as Special Olympics Maryland celebrates the 20th MSP Polar Bear Plunge. Ben started off as a Plunger taking on the role of plunging with VIP's and dignitaries. In the past number of years he has joined the Super Plunge team along with 5 or 6 or his fellow athletes in Plunging every hour for 24 hours. [Click here to make a donation to support Ben in the upcoming Plunge.](#)

Ben has also just finished his term in December 2015 on the Special Olympics Maryland Board of Directors. Not letting grass grow under his feet, Ben continues to give back by coaching and officiating Bocce in Montgomery County and at the state level. Ben would also like to take on more of an athlete leadership role through public speaking.

When he is not training, competing, leading, working and plunging Ben belongs to a theatre group called ArtStream where he acts, sings and dances in productions. ArtStream's mission is to create artistic opportunities for individuals in communities traditionally underserved by the arts.

Meet Bella - The Future of Special Olympics Maryland



Bella was born with Down syndrome. Her parents, Chris and Kari, joined us at an *Evening with Champions* held on December 1, 2015 at the Argyle Country Club in Rockville, MD. This was an opportunity for people to meet some of our athletes and get to know them a little better through their own



The 2016 Polar Bear Plunge is just days away. Special thanks to all our sponsors!



personal stories. Through a series of questions and answers, Kari, Chris and Bella Hicks let their story unfold. Here's a glimpse into their world:

Jim: How old is Bella?

Chris: Bella is 4 ½ years old.

Jim: When did you find out Bella had Down syndrome?

Chris: It was moments after she was born

Jim: What feelings were you experiencing when you got the news?

Chris: Surprise, shock, scared...mostly scared. I was praying out loud while the doctors were wrapping her in a blanket.

Kari: It wasn't expected. We had some minimal testing and everything looked fine. She came out not breathing and I just wanted to know what was wrong.

Jim: How has Bella impacted your lives?

Kari: Bella has expanded our world in so many way GOOD ways. We have met so many wonderful people because of her. She's just been the biggest blessing.

Chris: Bella is the youngest of our four kids. We have a son Andrew and two other daughters, Erin and Elena. Andrew wanted a baby brother and wasn't too happy when he got the news in the waiting room that he had another baby sister. Bella was in the NICU for a couple of days. The first night we brought her home, we sat down to dinner and before we said grace, I asked everyone to share something they were thankful for. We all added something, then Andrew said "Bella, thank you for not being the brother I wanted". I'll never forget that. That's how it's always been with our family. Bella is, and has been, the center of our family and she will make sure everyone knows that.

Jim: So tell us about Team ChickaBella

Chris: For about 10 years we used to support a friend through the Polar Bear Plunge with a donation to Special Olympics. The January before Bella was born I followed up with him to let him know I didn't get his email about the plunge. He told me he'd retired from plunging and asked that we send our donation to Super Plunger Adam Hays who is a Special Olympics athlete; so that's what we did. After Bella was born, I told my brother Eddie that I wasn't going to donate to my friend anymore, that I was going to jump into the water...and get wet...and get cold. Eddie said, "I'll do it with you". That's how Team ChickaBella got started. For our first Plunge we had 17 people and another 15-20 people supporting us from the beach. The next year the numbers almost doubled, and now I think were up to 25 people plunging on our team and probably 30 people who come out to support us. We've had an incredible experience with the Polar Bear



Terps and Special Olympics Maryland Team Up on January 14th

COLLEGE PARK, Md. - The Maryland men's basketball program teamed up with Special Olympics of Maryland for a day of hoops and camaraderie Thursday at the XFINITY Center.

A total of 42 athletes visited College Park to watch the Terps practice before being officially introduced to the players and coaching staff.

"Most importantly, together the University of Maryland is an exceptional team and all of us here tonight along with the 7,169 athletes from all over Maryland see you as role models," said Michael Heup, a Special Olympic athlete whose father is a Maryland alum. "We are all athletes striving to achieve greatness. We appreciate the team taking the time to spend with us today. The Special Olympics goal is to inspire in greatness in athletes. Watching your team is an inspiration to us to work towards that goal."

The fun continued when the players hosted a coaching clinic prior to a game featuring the Special Olympic athletes and the third-ranked Terrapins.

"I think both sides get a lot of it. It was a great day and we've got a lot of fantastic athletes out here," head coach Mark Turgeon, whose work with the Special Olympics began as a student-

Plunge and Team ChickaBella. A couple of years ago Jim asked us to write a story about our Team for the Plunge Newsletter and Kari wrote a very poignant article about what Team ChickaBella means to us. After the story went out, I was looking at our list of team members and I didn't recognize one of the names on the list, Julie Dukes. I asked everyone else on the team if they knew her and they didn't. After connecting with her at the plunge and asking her who she knew on the team, she said "I don't know anybody, but when I read the story about Team ChickaBella I knew I wanted to plunge and I wanted to join your team." She's been on our team ever since. (Side note: to date, Team ChickaBella has raised over \$32,000 for Special Olympics Maryland!) [Click here to support to Team ChickaBella at the 2016 MSP Polar Bear Plunge on Saturday.](#)

Jim: So Bella is a future Special Olympics athlete. What are you looking forward to with Special Olympics?

Kari: She did play some soccer in the fall and that was interesting (laughs) and we are looking forward to her continuing with that. We would also like to explore basketball and cheerleading.

Jim: Is there anything else you want to share with the group?

Chris: Kari said that when Bella was born, she was afraid our world was going to get smaller, but she – all of us – realized that it truly has just gotten bigger. The friends that you meet, the people that you interact with, the inspiration that you get from individuals...Jim you said it right when you said everyone brings their own gifts to the table. When Bella is in the classroom, we feel she really benefits from being in an inclusive environment, but we often hear that so many more people benefit by being around her. I truly believe that we grow more by being involved with individuals with special needs...they grow a tremendous amount, but we might grow a little bit more.

Raising the Bar a Little Higher

[know that the Special Olympic athletes look up to our guys and know who they are and follow them. It also allows our athletes to understand how lucky they are and how blessed they are. These Special Olympic athletes really enjoy life and they made it fun out there today." "It was such a rewarding experience to work with these athletes, playing the game that we all love," senior guard Rasheed Sulaimon said. "The smiles were contagious. We had a blast out there today." Click here to see the video produced by the University of Maryland athletic department.](#)



Special Olympics Maryland - Original Leather Bracelet - Red
\$10 from each purchase will be donated to Special Olympics Maryland





Thomas Morere is pictured here with Coach L J Belsito at I-STEP

Over 1,700 coaches state-wide volunteer their time and expertise to train athletes throughout the state of Maryland. Special Olympics Maryland would not exist without their tireless efforts. And each of these coaches has their own story as to how and why they are so committed to volunteering for Special Olympics. Linda Jo (L J) Belsito is no exception.

I sat down with L J at her new power lifting training facility in Rockville, MD called I-STEP (Iron-Strength Training, Education & Performance) which opened up this past June. A year ago, this facility was just a vision, but because of her involvement with Special Olympics, and her bond with an athlete and his mother, another dream in L J's life has come true. L J Belsito is not new to the sport of power lifting or achieving dreams. L J grew up in a family that valued sports and doing your best. Her father was a Special Education teacher and was also one of the first men to play lacrosse back in the 40's. His achievements led him to be inducted into the Lacrosse Hall of Fame. Both of her brothers played sports, and they were always encouraged to do their best and give 150%. L J began a career in power lifting and Olympic weight lifting that spans over 30 years. She was inducted into both the Powerlifting Hall of Fame and the Masters Weight Lifting Hall of Fame. She was also the 2013 Women's Masters Grand Slam Champion and 2015 Women's Masters National & World Cup Champion. L J began her journey with Special Olympics Maryland in 2010. The Montgomery County program was in need of an assistant coach for the power lifting

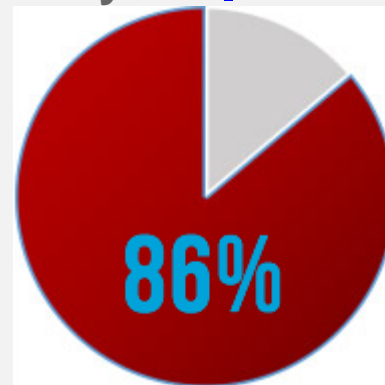
[Bravelets will donate \\$10 back to Special Olympics Maryland for every item purchased. Click here for more information.](#)



Athletes Served
7,169

5,291 TRAINING & COMPETITION
1,878 TRAINING
2013-2014 CHANGE
(+ 2.8%)
(+ 196 athletes)

Spending Wisely in Maryland



86% of every dollar raised is spent on sports training and competition, and athlete retention and recruitment.
Click here to see a copy of our current financials

program, so she decided to help out and has never looked back. She quickly found out how the athletes are focused on achieving goals, and will work hard in order to make their goals a reality. Currently 18 athletes are actively involved in Montgomery County. When I asked L J if there were any pivotal moments while coaching for Special Olympics, she said there were many, but she also wanted to share more about an athlete named Thomas Morere. When Thomas came to her at the age of 16, he was faced with many challenges. In addition to an intellectual disability, Thomas is also deaf and struggles with balance. So L J embraced this opportunity, and with the help of Thomas' mom Donna, has learned some basic sign language and worked with Thomas to overcome and adapt to these challenges. On October 24th, at the age of 23, Thomas pulled 375 lbs in the deadlift competition and won a gold medal in his weight class. But L J knew he could do better. So on December 17th Coach Belsito provided Thomas the opportunity to achieve a personal record in the deadlift. His previous personal best in competition was 390 at the 2014 Special Olympics USA Summer Games. Thomas delivered and made L J, his parents and small gathering of supporters proud as he pulled 402 (easy according to L J), then went to 410 and hit 418 lbs on his third and final lift of the night. [Click here to see a video of his lift.](#)

L J also reflected on a moment at the 2014 Special Olympics USA Summer Games. While she was getting her athletes warmed up for competition, Tiger Patrick, the power lifting coach from Special Olympics Massachusetts, approached her and said "You're the real deal". When she asked him what he meant, he explained he could tell that she knew what she was doing and was sticking to the plan. She explained that's exactly what the athletes have told me they want me to do. They know what they need to do to reach their goals, I just provide them with the training and guidance they need to get there.

"If I can make a difference in just one person's life, than I have accomplished what I set out to do. I live by the quote "Life is a journey, not a destination." Never let anyone tell you "you can't". Train smart. Set realistic goals. And don't ever stop reaching for the stars."

Thanks L J for setting the bar high, and leading by example for all of us.

(This article contributed by Sue Jacobs, VP of Donor Relations)

For more information on coaching opportunities in your community, please email Special Olympics

Maryland at coaches@somd.org or visit our website at www.somd.org



We'd Love to Hear Back from You!

Special Olympics Maryland wants to know about you and your experiences with our organization. We would appreciate it if you could take a couple of minutes to fill out this brief survey, **click here.**

If you'd like to share our Impact newsletter with family and friends, **encourage them to subscribe here.**

**3701 Commerce Drive # 103, Baltimore, Maryland 21227
410.242.1515 | news@somd.org | www.somd.org**