**Special Olympics 2015 Press Releases**

## Special Olympics Athlete and Advocate Lucy Meyer to Raise Funds and Awareness for Children with Disabilities Globally

###### **July 16, 2015**

 **New York** – Special Olympics and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF are proud to announce the appointment of 16-year-old Lucy Meyer as the spokesperson for a special partnership between Special Olympics and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF to help generate visibility and raise resources for programs that benefit children with disabilities around the world.  
  
In her new 2-year-long role, Lucy will be speaking at major events across the United States, spreading awareness and raising critical funds in support of collaborative UNICEF and Special Olympics programs in countries such as Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Belize and Brazil. These programs range from providing opportunities for sports training and competition to children with disabilities, to educating parents and caregivers on what health and social services are available in their communities.  
  
Lucy’s new position is an expansion of her ongoing efforts to advocate on behalf of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities globally. Over the past three years, Lucy has taken her message on behalf of the global community of children with disabilities to audiences in her home-state of California, in New York at the United Nations and in Washington, D.C. She has presented to the President of the United States, international diplomats and has met directly with U.S. Senators and Representatives to share her personal story, urge ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and discuss other issues related to disability rights. She was named the U.S. Fund for UNICEF’s Spokesperson for Children with Disabilities in 2013, and a 2015 Special Olympics World Games Global Messenger.  
  
“I am honored to be the spokesperson for the partnership between the U.S. Fund for UNICEF and Special Olympics,” said Lucy Meyer. “I am excited to work with the partnership to raise awareness, change attitudes and provide opportunities to children with disabilities around the world. I want all children to have the same opportunities in health, education and sports that I have had. Acceptance and inclusion for children with disabilities should not depend upon where you are born, but should be a right for all the world's children.”  
  
Born with cerebral palsy, Lucy is passionate about helping children around the world with disabilities. A swimmer, she is an active Special Olympics athlete and past gold medal winner, representing Team Southern California at the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games in Princeton, New Jersey.   
  
Lucy’s involvement with the U.S. Fund for UNICEF began in 2011, when she began Trick-or-Treating for UNICEF. In January 2013, she established a fund to support children with disabilities in developing countries. To date, she has helped raise more than $250,000 for UNICEF’s programs benefiting children with disabilities through her website, <http://www.unicefusa.org/donate/lucymeyer>.  
  
“Lucy is sharing an essential message—that all children have hopes and dreams, and all children deserve a fair chance to make their dreams become a reality,” said Caryl Stern, president and CEO of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. “We’re proud to work with Lucy and grateful she’s lending her powerful voice to help ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, can reach their full potential.”   
  
"Lucy is what we call a true game changer for inclusion. Through her efforts and hard work, she is ensuring that worldwide, children with disabilities are getting the same opportunities to compete in sports, receive healthcare and be part of their communities, “ said Janet Froetscher, CEO of Special Olympics. "We congratulate Lucy, a gold medal-winning Special Olympics athlete, in being selected for this new role where she will help change perceptions and create opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.”   
  
According to UNICEF’s 2013 State of the World’s Children Report, an estimated 93 million children under the age of 15 have a disability globally. Across the developing world, children with disabilities are often invisible. They are excluded from school, hidden by their families, and abandoned by their governments. They are denied access to education, health care, and other lifesaving services, and they face discrimination, prejudice, and abuse on a daily basis. Children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be victims of violence, and in many countries, they are significantly more likely to experience abuse at home.

## Westfield Supports the 2015 Special Olympics World Games At Events Throughout Southern California

###### **July 14, 2015**

**Los Angeles** - **Westfield**, a global leader in premier retail destinations with 40 shopping centers in the U.S. and U.K, is proud to announce its support of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games ([LA2015](http://www.la2015.org/)), the world's largest sporting and humanitarian event this year, through multiple events at select Southern California centers.

To celebrate the largest event to come to Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games, various Westfield centers will host Torch Ceremonies for the Law Enforcement Torch Run**®** (LETR) Final Leg for the LA2015 Special Olympics World Games, as well as dinners and presentations for several delegations who will be staying at World Games Host Towns in surrounding areas in the days leading up to the World Games Opening Ceremony on Saturday, July 25. Honoring the 6,500 athletes and 2,000 coaches arriving in the city of Angels from all over the world, the events leading up to the World Games will occur between Friday, July 17 and Thursday, July 23.

Participating Westfield centers and events include:

**Westfield Valencia** will kick-off the celebrations by hosting a Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg Ceremony on Friday, July 17 for an expected 300 attendees. Speakers include Santa Clarita Mayor Marsh McLean, Special Olympics athletes and executives, and Westfield Valencia's General Manager Tom Miller. The event will include support from Remo Drums providing all athletes with drums for celebratory drum circle during the festivities. Additionally, the Santa Clarita area is happy to serve as a World Games Host Town to the delegations from the Philippines, El Salvador, Malawi, and the Faroe Islands prior to the Games. Westfield Valencia will also host a welcome parade on Thursday, July 23 to celebrate the Host Town athletes.

**Westfield Topanga** will host approximately 500 Special Olympics delegates from Special Olympics Programs in Serbia, Timor-Leste, Azerbaijan, Malta, Cambodia, Venezuela and Hellas (Greece), Host Town Community Members, law enforcement personnel and dignitaries on Wednesday, July 22. The day will begin with athletes and delegates treated to lunch, followed by a Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg Ceremony run through the center and ending in The Canyon area of the center. The Special Olympics Torch Run Final Leg ceremony will include several law enforcement officials, dignitaries, Westfield team members and supporters. After the Special Olympics Torch Run Ceremony, Special Olympics delegates will have time to explore the center along with special in-store events at Westfield Topanga retailers. Retail event partners include California Pizza Kitchen, Microsoft, Macy's, Malibu Surf Shack, Mrs. Fields, Neiman Marcus Topanga, ivivva athletica, Steve Madden and community event partners including A Rental Connection, ABM, Go Green Auto Spa and Valet, WENA Productions, ARC Document Solutions, Capture Imaging, GEC Events, TLC Creative, Valley Village, and New West Symphony.

**Westfield Century City** will host a dinner following the end of the torch run in West Hollywood with athletes, local law enforcement officials and supporters in the center's dining terrace on Wednesday, July 22. Additionally, a lunch will be hosted on Thursday, July 23 for 91 delegates from Special Olympics Gibraltar and Monaco.

**Westfield Santa Anita** will welcome 100 delegates from Special Olympics Trinidad & Tobago and Krygyz Republic on Thursday, July 23, at an event sponsored by the city of Arcadia. The event will include notable speakers from the Arcadia community, city officials and Westfield Santa Anita General Manager Ramon Oseguera.

**Westfield UTC** will host 287 delegates from Special Olympics Costa Rica for a day of fun and shopping on Thursday, July 23.

**Westfield Plaza Bonita** will host 110 delegates from Special Olympics Argentina and Puerto Rico for lunch at John's Incredible Pizza and an in-center scavenger hunt on Thursday, July 23.

Westfield takes great pride in its longstanding relationship with Special Olympics Southern California, helping raise significant funds that enable the organization to enrich the lives of over 17,000 Southern California athletes, their families and communities, through the power of sports, education, and athlete health. In 2014, more than 70 Westfield employees and their families volunteered their time for the annual Pier del Sol event, which over Westfield's 18-year sponsorship history has helped to raise more than $7.3 million for the athletes of Special Olympics Southern California.

For more information on the events at each Westfield center, please visit: [Westfield.com/US](http://www.westfield.com/us/)

For more information on the 2015 Special Olympics World Games and to purchase Opening Ceremony tickets, please visit: [LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/).

## Law Enforcement Torch Run® (LETR) Final Leg for the 2015 Special Olympics World Games Begins Today in Sacramento

###### **July 13, 2015**

**Sacramento, CA -** Today, on the steps of the California State Capitol, Special Olympics athletes and law enforcement officers from all over the world, and World Games officials were welcomed by Governor Jerry Brown and Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom for the launch of the Law Enforcement Torch Run ([LETR](http://www.letr.org/)) Final Leg. The historic Final Leg will visit and hold ceremonies in 127 cities, towns and communities and travel 4,648 miles on three routes throughout the state before lighting the cauldron at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to open the 2015 Special Olympics World Games on July 25.

The Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics is Special Olympics' largest grass-roots fundraiser and public awareness vehicle in the world. More than 100,000 law enforcement members in all 50 U.S. States, 12 Canadian provinces/territories, and 47 other countries contribute to LETR efforts annually as Guardians of the Flame®, ensuring the delivery of the Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* to the Opening Ceremonies of local Special Olympics competitions, state/provincial Games, and national/regional Games.

"For more than 30 years, the Law Enforcement Torch Run has been an integral part of the Special Olympics Movement," said Patrick McClenahan, LA2015 President and CEO. "We look forward to seeing Californians cheering on the Final Leg Team as they bring the World Games message of acceptance and inclusion throughout the state."

The LETR Final Leg for the 2015 World Games, presented by Bank of America, will take place from July 13-July 25. A team of 124 members - which includes 88 law enforcement officer runners, 10 Special Olympics athletes, and logistics personnel - will serve as Guardians of the Flame as they run the *Flame of Hope* throughout the state. Law Enforcement Torch Runners from around the world were chosen for their dedication and commitment to the Law Enforcement Torch Run and Special Olympics by their respective Torch Run Programs. Special Olympics athletes were selected to be a part of the Final Leg Team based on nominations received from around the world.

"The Final Leg event is an amazing opportunity for law enforcement officers from around the world who work tirelessly year-round in support of Special Olympics, not only to help build excitement for the World Games and create awareness for Special Olympics, but also to showcase and highlight the skills and abilities of their teammates, ten (10) Special Olympics athletes from around the world on this unified team," said John Newnan, Team Captain for the Final Leg Team. "These athletes, along with their partners in law enforcement, will tell their personal 'stories' at 127 ceremonies, helping to bring awareness, understanding and acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities to cities and towns throughout California that we will visit during the 13 days of the Final Leg event. We draw our strength, inspiration and motivation from the athletes and are proud to be a part of a movement called the Law Enforcement Torch Run that is the largest grass-roots fundraiser for Special Olympics worldwide."

The public will be able to see daily photographs, videos and read reports of the *Flame of Hope*'s journey online at: [LETR-FinalLeg.org](http://letr-finalleg.org/) and on social with #FinalLeg2015 on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Law-Enforcement-Torch-Run-for-Special-Olympics/148570931839550) and @LETRforSO on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/LETRforSO).

The World Games will be hosted in Los Angeles for nine days from July 25-August 2 and feature 25 Olympic-type sports: Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cycling, Equestrian, Football, Golf, Gymnastics, Half Marathon, Handball, Judo, Kayaking, Open Water Swimming, Powerlifting, Roller Skating, Sailing, Softball, Table Tennis, Tennis, Triathlon, Volleyball, and Beach Volleyball. These Games will showcase the unlimited potential of people with intellectual disabilities - one of the largest disability populations in the world.

The Opening Ceremony will take place at the Memorial Coliseum, site of the Opening Ceremonies of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games, on Saturday, July 25 and will be televised to a worldwide audience by ESPN. To buy tickets and learn more, visit [LA2015.org/opening-ceremony](http://www.la2015.org/opening-ceremony). For volunteer information, including becoming a Fan in the Stands, visit [LA2015.org/volunteer/fans-in-the-stands](http://www.la2015.org/volunteer/fans-in-the-stands)

## Special Olympics Flame of Hope Arrives in Los Angeles After Historic Unified Relay Across America Presented by Bank of America

###### **July 10, 2015**

**Los Angeles, CA**  – The Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* will officially arrive in Los Angeles today after having traveled 46 days and over 20,500 miles as part of the first-ever Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America Presented by Bank of America. The Unified Relay began its journey as three simultaneous routes in Augusta, Maine, Washington, D.C. and Miami, Florida on 26 May and has traveled west, visiting all 50 states, to deliver the *Flame of Hope* to Los Angeles in anticipation of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games starting on 25 July.

The three flames will become unified at Dodger Stadium tonight with the completion of the Unified Relay and will be handed over to the *Guardians of the Flame™,* law enforcement officers and Special Olympics athletes, who will take the *Flame of Hope* on its Final Leg throughout California before arriving to the Opening Ceremony. The conclusion of the Unified Relay Across America coincides with the birthday of Special Olympics' founder, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, who spent her life championing acceptance and inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Former First Lady of California and Special Olympics International Board Member and daughter of Mrs. Shriver, Maria Shriver and her children, celebrated Mrs. Shriver's birthday in the way she would want it celebrated - by participating in the last stop of the Relay in Los Angeles.

"On behalf of all of the athletes and families of Special Olympics, we thank America for carrying the torch for inclusion and respect," said Janet Froetscher, CEO, Special Olympics. "Watching the country rally on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities is proof that together we are changing the game. It is our hope that this is just the beginning of more inclusive communities everywhere."

As the presenting sponsor of the Unified Relay Across America and the 2015 Los Angeles Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg, and a Special Olympics partner for more than 30 years, Bank of America's scale and resources helped bring cross-country awareness to the Special Olympics movement at an unprecedented level. The Unified Relay gave thousands of participants the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to carry the *Flame of Hope* on its way to the 2015 Special Olympics World Games and brought a message of unity and inclusion to the nation.

"I could not be more proud of the outpouring of support across the country for the Unified Relay, or more touched by the opportunity to carry the *Flame of Hope*," said Anne Finucane, Bank of America global chief strategy and marketing officer and a member of the Special Olympics Board of Directors. "With more than 2,000 Bank of America employees prepared to volunteer at the upcoming World Games, we continue to put our resources behind the Special Olympics as it transforms lives through the powers of courage, acceptance and inclusivity."

Each state greeted the Unified Relay with welcoming ceremonies and community celebrations. The nationwide movement celebrated at noteworthy stops such as the NASCAR Hall of Fame in North Carolina, Epcot at the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, ESPN's world headquarters in Bristol, Connecticut, and in communities spanning from St. Louis to Seattle, Pittsburgh to Portland, Atlanta to Austin and everywhere in-between.

To date, the Unified Relay Across America has raised over 1.6 million dollars for Special Olympics and more than 10,000 people walked, biked, ran or rolled the *Flame of Hope* across all 50 states on its journey west including Michelle Kwan, Olympic figure-skating legend and Special Olympics International Board Member; and Unified Relay celebrity co-captains Big Show of Unified Relay promotional partner WWE; Mike Golic and Mike Greenberg, co-hosts of the ESPN radio broadcast, "Mike and Mike in the Morning"; Aloe Blacc, American singer and songwriter; Josh Turner, American singer and actor;  Maria Menounos, author, producer and host at E! Entertainment and Special Olympics Global Ambassador; Nancy O'Dell, host of Entertainment Tonight, producer, author, and Special Olympics Global Ambassador; Apolo Ohno, American short track speed skating Olympic champion and Special Olympics Global Ambassador and 15 Olympians including Olympic Gold Medalist and Special Olympics Global Ambassador Hannah Teter.  Throughout the Relay more than 100 community celebrations were hosted and featured musical performances by Reverb Nation artists across the country. Global Ambassadors and Co-Captains Elena Delle Donne and Joe Haden also help promote and engage the nation in the Relay.

Following its arrival in Los Angeles, the World Games Law Enforcement Torch Run® Final Leg Team, comprised of law enforcement officials representing 23 countries, along with 10 Special Olympics athletes will accept the*Flame of Hope.* This team will continue the *Flame of Hope*'s journey to 120 cities and towns throughout California and travel to host towns where the Special Olympics World Games delegations from more than 170 countries will participate in cultural gift exchanges prior to the World Games.    

"Law enforcement officers from around the world have been volunteering together for over 34 years to champion acceptance and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities through the Law Enforcement Torch Run," said John Newnan, Final Leg Team Captain. "It is our honor to be the Guardians of the Flame creating awareness for Special Olympics and excitement for the 2015 Los Angeles Special Olympics World Games on the Final Leg of the Law Enforcement Torch Run."

The *Flame of Hope* will culminate its journey at the Opening Ceremony on 25 July and signify the official start of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games. ESPN, the official global broadcast partner of the World Games will be on site from Los Angeles to televise the Opening Ceremony live as well as a nightly highlights program throughout the nine-day event.  Tune into ESPN on 25 July for live coverage of Opening Ceremony!

## Trio of Murals Immortalize Special Olympics Athletes’ Journeys into Los Angeles History

###### **July 07, 2015**

**Los Angeles -** Today, and decades from now, Los Angeles residents and visitors can discover the spirit of Special Olympics. As part of Toyota's "Share the Journey" campaign for the [2015 Special Olympics World Games](http://www.la2015.org/), athletes' uplifting journeys inspired three public murals dedicated today. City leaders joined Toyota executives, artists and Special Olympics fans at the freshly painted Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum mural to ask for participation and a celebration of athletes' joy and courage.

Like the original freeway murals created for the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, the Special Olympics-inspired artwork is intended to stand the test of time. Working with the Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles, the internationally recognized muralist and original 1984 Olympics artist Kent Twitchell returned to create one of his famous realistic portraits. Twitchell's piece and the two other murals mark the upcoming global event and build on the city's storied history of outdoor art.

"The murals are a lasting gift to Los Angeles to celebrate the life-changing power of Special Olympics and also honor the rich, artistic history of this city that has embraced us," said Jim Lentz, CEO of Toyota North America. "Special Olympics is not only an important global sports movement, but also an organization that touches individuals every day around the world.  We hope everyone gets to experience the impact and help us cheer on the athletes."

Fans can cheer during 25 Olympic-style events throughout the region, tune into ESPN coverage or send support through social media that will be displayed on-site. Toyota is collecting athlete encouragements and stories with the hashtag #sharethejourney and at [sharethejourney.toyota.com](http://sharethejourney.toyota.com/). Competition events are free and open to the public, and tickets for the Opening Ceremony are available for purchase at [LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/about-games/opening-ceremony) via Ticketmaster.

All three murals are just blocks away from venues hosting Special Olympics World Games events July 25-August 2. Each weaves in the spirit of Special Olympics through the individual artist's own iconic vision. Discover stories around each piece at [sharethejourney.toyota.com](http://sharethejourney.toyota.com/).

* Located at 1147 S. Hope St. in Los Angeles, Twitchell's piece **Special Olympics Monument** is a double portrait. Rafer Johnson, an LA icon and Olympic gold medalist as well as founder of Special Olympics Southern California, stands alongside Loretta Claiborne, a successful Special Olympics athlete and motivational speaker.
* Located at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, **World Stage Legacy** by well-known muralist David Flores pays tribute to the 2015 Special Olympics World Games and events that have taken place at the Coliseum throughout its more than 90-year history. Figures include Special Olympics athlete and World Games Global Messenger, Ramon Hooper alongside iconic figures with a connection to the site.
* Located at 1248 South Figueroa in Los Angeles, **The Greatest** from the artist Cryptik features a large-scale portrait of boxing legend Muhammad Ali and multiple plaques with inspirational quotations from Special Olympics athletes and advocates. Visitors can move up close to the piece to explore the words and connections.

"Long after the 2015 Special Olympics World Games end in Los Angeles, the mural project leaves a historical monument to our athletes' spirit, determination and courage," said Patrick McClenahan, president and CEO of LA2015, the Games Organizing Committee for this year's event. "Toyota's partnership and support of the mission of Special Olympics has helped us reach further in spreading the message of acceptance and to make a lasting impact."

The Special Olympics World Games will be the largest sports and humanitarian event anywhere in the world in 2015, hosting 177 countries, 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches. It is the single biggest event in Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games.

For more information about the Special Olympics World Games, visit [www.LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/). For information about Toyota's philanthropy programs, visit [www.toyota.com/usa](http://www.toyota.com/usa).

## Dodgers to Support 2015 Special Olympics World Games and Present World Games Medals to Softball Champions

###### **July 07, 2015**

**Los Angeles** - The Los Angeles Dodgers has partnered with the Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015 (LA2015) this summer. With nearly 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches representing 170 countries, along with 30,000 volunteers and an anticipated 500,000 spectators, the 2015 Special Olympics World Games - being staged in Los Angeles July 25-August 2, 2015 - will be the largest sports and humanitarian event anywhere in the world in 2015, and one of the biggest events in Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games.

To support this sports and humanitarian effort, the Dodgers have donated $100,000 to the LA2015 Special Olympics World Games.

"The Dodgers are dedicated to making baseball and sports accessible for people of all ages," said Naomi Rodriguez, the Dodgers' Senior Director, External Affairs and Community Relations.  "As part of the cultural fabric of Los Angeles, the Dodgers are proud to support this humanitarian effort because the Special Olympics World Games showcases not only the journey of these athletes, but also their courage and passion. The World Games break down barriers on so many levels, and the beautiful thing about this event is that it brings together hundreds of cultures from around the world.  It's truly inspiring and the Dodgers are excited and honored to be a part of it."

The Dodgers have been promoting the World Games by participating in the LA2015 Circle of Inclusion social media campaign. The Circle, which is part of the World Games logo, represents the mission of the World Games - to create the awareness that leads to acceptance and inclusion of all people with intellectual disabilities. Among the Dodgers participating in this campaign are:

Dodger manager Don Mattingly, first baseman Adrian Gonzalez, outfielders Joc Pederson and Andre Ethier, infielder-outfielder Justin Turner, former Dodgers Orel Hershiser, Fernando Valenzuela, Al Ferrara and Maury Wills and Spanish broadcasters Jaime and Jorge Jarrin. Photographs may be seen on various Dodgers social media sites in the month of July leading up to the Games and for the duration of the competition.

On Friday, July 10, prior to the Dodgers game against the Milwaukee Brewers, the Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America will culminate at Dodger Stadium. The first of its kind relay covered 50 states over 46 days with the final leg ending at the stadium. The Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* will then continue on its journey throughout California by the Law Enforcement Torch Run**®** Final Leg team, presented by Bank of America, for the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, culminating with the lighting of the cauldron at the Opening Ceremony on July 25.

The first 40,000 fans in attendance at the 7:10 p.m. game will receive a Special Olympics World Games commemorative Pin, presented by Bank of America.

The Dodgers will also invite fans to participate in the Circle of Inclusion social media campaign. During pre-game activities, beginning at 5 p.m. at the left field plaza, fans can meet Dodger Alumni, World Games Staff and Special Olympics athletes, and pose with the Circle of Inclusion. Fans are encouraged to share their pictures on social media using the official campaign hashtags #ReachUPLA, #LA2015, @LA2015 along with the Dodger Official hashtags #Dodgers @Dodgers.

As a sports organization the Dodgers have continuously supported efforts that enrich people's lives through sport. Partnering with the Special Olympics World Games goes hand in hand with a continuous effort to make sports and more specifically baseball and softball accessible for all. This season, the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation (LADF) is serving over 4,000 youth through its Dodgers RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) program. And in efforts to include those who sometimes get left out of the game due to physical or intellectual disabilities, LADF announced that it was building the first universally accessible Dodgers Dreamfield at the Baldwin Hills Recreation Center, a $650,000 project funded by the Dodgers and to be dedicated this summer. With the goals of promoting the inclusion of under-resourced youth and a focus on teamwork, fun and fair play, LADF instills sportsmanship and teamwork in the youth who participate in their programs. To further reinforce these principles, the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation will invite all of its 4,000 Dodgers RBI Baseball and Softball participants and their families to be Fans in the Stands at the final Softball Competition of the World Games, Saturday, August 1 at 11 a.m. at UCLA's Easton Stadium for a Dodgers RBI Day at the World Games.

At the conclusion of the Softball competition on Saturday, August 1, Hall of Fame Manager Tommy Lasorda; Senior Director, External Affairs and Community Relations Naomi Rodriguez; and Executive Director of the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation Nichol Whiteman will participate in the medal ceremony, honoring the World Games Softball Champions.

## LA84 Foundation Pledges $1 Million to Special Olympics World Games

###### **June 29, 2015**

**Los Angeles** - Today, the LA84 Foundation Board of Directors increased its commitment to the 2015 Special Olympics World Games to $1 million. This is the World Games' largest donation to date from a private foundation.

This effort follows the Foundation's initial grant award of $250,000 announced in January to help cover field of play expenses; the Board's decision will increase the grant by $750,000, for a total of $1 million. In addition, the Special Olympics World Games Organizing Committee is pledging its best efforts to match these funds in the coming months.

"We are pleased to announce our $1 million pledge for the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, which promises to be a landmark event in the history of Los Angeles," said Anita L. DeFrantz, President of the LA84 Foundation and Executive Board Member of the International Olympic Committee.

"The LA84 Foundation is proud to continue the bond between the 1984 Olympic Games and Special Olympics that began 31 years ago," said LA84 Foundation Board Member Peter V. Ueberroth, who served as President of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee during the 1984 Olympic Games and led the effort to establish the LA84 Foundation with a portion of its surplus funds. "The Special Olympics was one of the four primary beneficiaries of the 1984 Olympic Games torch relay, receiving more than $2.3 million."

The 2015 Special Olympics World Games will take place July 25 - August 2, and will be the largest single event hosted by the City of Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games. Approximately 7,000 athletes from 177 countries will compete in 25 athletic events, supported by upwards of 30,000 volunteers, 3,000 coaches and 500,000 spectators- the world's largest sports or humanitarian event this year.

"This significant pledge from LA84 demonstrates that the positive legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games lives on in our city," said Patrick McClenahan, President and CEO of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, who also is a member of LA84's Board of Directors. "We look forward to welcoming athletes from around the world next month for the 2015 World Games, which will once again unite the diverse communities of Los Angeles. We hope that many fans will join us to cheer on these inspirational athletes as they compete with courage, determination and joy."

Over the past 30 years, the LA84 Foundation has built a strong reputation as the leading regional supporter of youth sports. Originally endowed with $93 million of the $232.5 million surplus funds from the 1984 Olympic Games, the Foundation has invested more than $225 million into communities located throughout the eight counties of Southern California.

## Talent Announced for Opening Ceremony at the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles

###### **June 18, 2015**

**Los Angeles** - The world's largest sports and humanitarian event this year - the Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015 (LA2015) - today announced its initial star-studded lineup for the event's Opening Ceremony on Saturday, July 25, 2015. Performers include Stevie Wonder, Avril Lavigne, O.A.R., Cody Simpson (featuring Special Olympics athlete Breanna Bogucki and YouTube sensation Madison Tevlin), Nicole Scherzinger, J Balvin, and *Reach Up LA* theme song creator Siedah Garrett. Appearances by Jimmy Kimmel, Eva Longoria, Michael Phelps, Yao Ming, Greg Louganis, Stephanie McMahon, and Lauren Potter (one of the most popular actresses with an intellectual disability) among others, the show is set to be one of the most inspirational events Los Angeles has ever hosted.

Combined, these entertainers have sold more than 180 million albums and singles, and have been recognized for hundreds of accolades including the Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards, Emmy Awards, Billboard Music Awards and Billboard Latin Music Awards, World Music Awards, Golden Globe Awards, MTV Video Music Awards, MTV Europe Music Awards, Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards, Radio Disney Music Awards and Young Hollywood Awards. Nearly 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches representing 170 countries will be welcomed at the Opening Ceremony, held at the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the site of the Opening Ceremonies for both the 1932 and 1984 Summer Olympic Games.

More than 60,000 fans including Royalty, Heads of State and Government, and other distinguished personalities will cheer on the athletes inside the Coliseum, while a global audience can watch coverage provided by ESPN, the official broadcast partner of the World Games. ESPN is distributing the Opening Ceremony around the world in multiple languages. Tickets to the Opening Ceremony and this once-in-a-lifetime experience are now available for purchase via [LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/) through Ticketmaster.

"Taking place in the heart of Los Angeles, the entertainment capital of the world, we are delighted to welcome these entertainment legends for a night to celebrate acceptance and inclusion for all," said Patrick McClenahan, President and Chief Executive Officer of LA2015, the Games Organizing Committee. "Everyone in the Coliseum, as well as the millions of viewers tuning in around the world, will have the chance to cheer on and celebrate the true stars of the Games, the Special Olympics athletes."

The creative production team who captured the world's imagination with the Opening Ceremonies for both the London 2012 Olympic Games and Sochi 2014 Olympic Games - FiveCurrents - will executive produce the World Games Opening Ceremony. The team is working with Emmy Award winner Debbie Allen, who is the Director for the Opening Ceremony. Specific details of the night's event, which will include the Parade of Athletes and culmination of the Final Leg of the Law Enforcement Torch Run® that will light the World Games cauldron, are being kept under tight security.

The headlining talent for the Opening Ceremony shared the following statements aligned to their upcoming participation in the LA2015 World Games Opening Ceremony:

"I am touched to be a part of this celebration of determination, courage, joy and skill," said Stevie Wonder, musician. "Throughout my own journey of overcoming the odds, it's truly an inspiring moment to join these incredible athletes as they come to Los Angeles to compete and accomplish so many victories."

"As a long-time supporter of Special Olympics, I am honored and excited to perform live for the first time a song I have dedicated to Special Olympics and the Games, "[Fly](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Moy3pRysP6Y)", at the Opening Ceremony," said Avril Lavigne, performer and singer. "It is always a true joy when I can help celebrate the abilities and determination of these amazing athletes."

"We are honored to be a part of something as special and as important as the Special Olympics World Games," said Marc Roberge, lead singer of O.A.R. "We can't wait to share the stage with Cody, Madison and Bree to sing our newest song, 'Reach Up'. 'Reach Up' is an anthem. We want people to hear it and feel like they can do anything."

"Special Olympics athletes are so inspiring to me," said Nicole Scherzinger, international recording artist and Special Olympics Global Ambassador. "I'm looking forward to celebrating the start of the World Games and cheering on the athletes as they show the world their outstanding athletic abilities."

"Having previously written and performed the theme songs for the 2007 Special Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in China, writing and performing this epic theme song 'Reach Up LA' for my hometown Los Angeles is one of the highlights of my career" said Siedah Garrett, singer-songwriter. "I am humbled and grateful to play a small part in this year's celebration of these incredible Special Olympics athletes."

"I truly understand that heart and perseverance can help overcome hurdles that stand between people and their dreams, so I feel greatly honored to join these inspiring athletes from many places and many cultures around the world that have worked so hard to get here," said J Balvin, singer-songwriter.

The World Games will be hosted for nine days from July 25-August 2 and feature 25 Olympic-style sports: Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cycling, Equestrian, Football, Golf, Gymnastics, Half Marathon, Handball, Judo, Kayaking, Open Water Swimming, Powerlifting, Roller Skating, Sailing, Softball, Table Tennis, Tennis, Triathlon, Volleyball, and Beach Volleyball. These Games will showcase the unlimited potential of people with intellectual disabilities - the largest disability population in the world. Competitions will take place daily at 27 venues throughout Los Angeles and they are free and open to the public. Plan your outing to support the athletes by checking out the competition schedule at [LA2015.org/schedule](http://www.la2015.org/schedule) and download the LA2015 app on [iTunes Store](https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewSoftware?id=958599469&mt=8) or [Google Play Store](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.spontly.specialolympicswg2015).

The Opening Ceremony will take place at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Saturday, July 25, 2015 starting at 6 p.m. PT and will be brought to a worldwide audience by ESPN and local broadcast partners. To learn more and purchase tickets, visit [LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/). Stay tuned for more announcements soon of additional talent joining the Opening Ceremony and World Games.

## Expanded Jr. NBA Efforts to Launch October 2015

###### **June 03, 2015**

**New York, NY** – The Jr. NBA – the league’s global youth basketball participation program for boys and girls – will launch its expanded efforts in the U.S. and Canada this October, the NBA announced today. The program aims to engage five million youth over the next two years through a series of basketball clinics, skills challenges, and regional tournaments.   
  
To reach its goal, the league will develop a network that will include many of its longstanding community partners, such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Jewish Community Centers of North America, the National Association of Police Athletic Leagues, the National Recreation and Park Association, the National Wheelchair Basketball Association, Special Olympics, the YMCA, and elementary and middle schools throughout North America. Additionally, the Jr. NBA partnership network will include NBA, WNBA, and NBA Development League teams’ local youth basketball programs.  
  
“Our expanded commitment to the Jr. NBA will go far beyond participation,” said NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. “We will focus on sharing the values of our game and providing an infrastructure to ensure that basketball is played and taught properly at the grassroots level.”   
  
The Jr. NBA program intends to develop a lifelong passion for basketball in boys and girls ages 6 -14 by teaching them the fundamentals while emphasizing sportsmanship, respect, teamwork, and healthy living.  
  
To lead the expanded efforts, the league announced today the hiring of David Krichavsky to serve as NBA Vice President, Youth Basketball. Krichavsky will join the NBA from the National Football League, where he implemented Heads Up Football, NFL FLAG, and other youth instruction and participation initiatives as NFL Director, Player Health and Safety.   
  
In the coming months, the NBA will announce a youth basketball leadership council that will provide direction to the program and work to create a fun, rewarding experience for participating kids, coaches, officials, and parents. The Jr. NBA will also partner with USA Basketball to support its Coach Licensing Program and Curriculum which focuses on educating coaches.

## ESPN Extends Support of Special Olympics’ Global Initiative to Promote Social Inclusion and Acceptance through Sports

###### **June 01, 2015**

ESPN and Special Olympics today announced a one-year extension to the two-year global initiative [announced in September 2013](http://espnmediazone.com/us/press-releases/2013/09/the-walt-disney-company-and-espn-team-up-with-special-olympics-for-global-initiative-to-promote-social-inclusion-and-acceptance-through-sports/http:/espnmediazone.com/us/press-releases/2013/09/the-walt-disney-company-and-espn-team-up-with-special-olympics-for-global-initiative-to-promote-social-inclusion-and-acceptance-through-sports/) that leverages the power of sports to promote an environment of social inclusion and acceptance, by uniting people with and without intellectual disabilities through the Special Olympics Unified Sports® program.

With today's announcement, ESPN will extend its commitment to be the global presenting sponsor and official media sponsor of Special Olympics Unified Sports.

To date, ESPN has invested nearly $5 million in financial and in-kind support. ESPN will continue to support Special Olympics' goal of registering one million Unified Sports participants, including athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities), teammates (individuals without intellectual disabilities) and coaches, by the end of 2015. There are currently more than 800,000 global participants in Unified Sports.

The announcement-made today by Kevin Martinez, vice president of [ESPN corporate citizenship](http://www.espnfrontrow.com/2015/05/sport-promotes-social-good-espn-launches-a-new-corporate-citizenship-strategy/), and Janet Froetscher, CEO of Special Olympics-continues Disney's and ESPN's 30-year commitment to Special Olympics, ESPN's first charitable investment. A portion of the one-year extension funds will continue to support an increase in Unified Sports participation in domestic and international markets announced in 2013. In addition, there will be expanded support in key growth markets, including China, Brazil and India. ESPN will also make possible key communications, marketing activations, coaches' trainings, conferences, research and other resources needed to assist Special Olympics in expanding Unified Sports worldwide.

Kevin Martinez, vice president of ESPN corporate citizenship: "I'm proud that our investment has helped grow the number of Unified athletes, teammates and coaches across the globe. We're excited to continue this momentum and spread the message of social inclusion to reach one million Unified athletes and coaches by the end of the year."

Janet Froetscher, CEO of Special Olympics: "Our partnership with Disney and ESPN has been game changing. It has provided us the critical platform to build our Special Olympics Unified Sports program worldwide and continue to create communities of inclusion and respect. One of our highest priorities as a movement is to mobilize youth everywhere to play and live unified, and break down the barriers that exist for people with intellectual disabilities. Having Disney and ESPN continue to help drive the importance of Unified Sports in their storytelling and awareness efforts will help us achieve full inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities."

In conjunction with the announcement, ESPN hosted a [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/) (URAA) celebration on its Bristol, Conn., campus. ESPN and ABC-media networks of The Walt Disney Company-are the Official Media Partners of the Unified Relay, which culminates at the 2015 Special Olympics World Games Opening Ceremony on July 25 in Los Angeles. ESPN is the [official broadcaster of the World Games](http://espnmediazone.com/us/press-releases/2014/04/specialolympics/) and will have three hours of live coverage of the Opening Ceremony on July 25 (9 p.m. ET, ESPN/WatchESPN) featuring Robin Roberts, co-host of ABC's Good Morning America, and SportsCenter anchors Lindsay Czarniak and Kevin Negandhi. In addition, there will be a nightly highlights program hosted byCzarniak and Negandhi throughout the nine-day event.

At today's URAA event, ESPN President John Skipper was one of the torchbearers running with the Flame of Hope  that will light the cauldron at the Opening Ceremony of the Special Olympics World Games. Among those joining Skipper were Mike Greenberg and Mike Golic (ESPN Radio'sMike & Mike) and SportsCenter  anchor Jay Harris. After entering campus with the Flame of Hope, Skipper spoke at a ceremony that was emceed by Negandhi and also included Froetscher; Beau Doherty, President of Special Olympics Connecticut; and Connecticut Special Olympics Unified Golf teammates, Lisa Thomasco of Mystic and Christine Post of Groton, from Special Olympics USA. In addition, World Games athletes Selina Derungs of Simsbury, Conn., (Aquatics) and Chuck Yenkner of Glastonbury, Conn., (Athletics) were in attendance.

The event also included live music by the pop rock band R5 and was attended by WWE Hall of Famer Hulk Hogan, who represented WWE as part of the company's support as Promotional Partner of the URAA and World Games.

## Special Olympics Announces Social Impact Summit to Take Place During Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles

###### **May 28, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.** - Special Olympics announced today the convening of the first Special Olympics Social Impact Summit focused on creating a truly unified generation, where youth will work together to fight inactivity, intolerance and injustice.  The GenUIn Social Impact Summit is designed to generate critical change around the pressing issues facing people with intellectual disabilities.  This six-day summit will be held from July 23-28 during the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles, Calif. and will feature 120 young social change leaders aged 16-25 years old, with and without intellectual disabilities, from around the world, who will challenge each other to generate true acts of inclusion in their respective communities.

The convening of this Summit follows the historic announcement that Special Olympics made at the White House last July when President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama hosted a dinner for Special Olympics at the White House.  The event celebrated the creation of the first-ever Generation Unified and the work that Special Olympics, with the support of the Obama administration and others, has been doing to activate young people to fight inactivity, intolerance and injustice in their schools and communities. "This organization has touched so many lives. It's about giving everyone a chance and treating them with dignity and respect," said President Obama in his remarks at the White House.

Earlier this year, youth leaders submitted over 135 proposals detailing a challenge and proposed solution to making their individual communities more inclusive for everyone. 40% of applications were admitted through a competitive process and Special Olympics review.  Each project selected will receive funding upon completion of the Summit program.  A total of 120 youth leaders have been selected to participate from a total of 30 countries. Of the 120, 40 youth leaders were selected as part of an exchange program between the U.S. and China as a result of the 5th High Level Consultation on People to People Exchange (CPE) in Beijing, during which, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Richard Stengel announced the launch of Special Olympics programming between U.S. and Chinese schools and universities. Youth leaders from various other partner organizations are also represented, including Lions Club International, UNICEF, the Future Project, and more.

"This will be the greatest gathering of young leaders committed to diversity, unity, and inclusion in history," said Tim Shriver, Special Olympics Chairman. "I am so eager to hear their ideas and support their efforts to make our schools and communities places where unified sport and unified ways of building community are expected and achieved."

Special Olympics athlete Brina Maxino and teammate Isabela Montaña from the Philippines have been selected to serve as co-chairs of the Summit, supported by teammate Abdulla Almedfaa and athlete Faisal Hameed from Bahrain who will serve as vice co-chairs. These two unified pairs were elected to these positions during the Global Youth Activation Summit held in PyeongChang, South Korea in 2013.

During the Summit, 12 mentors from Special Olympics partner organizations, most notably The Future Project, will train the youth leaders on gaining tangible skills to put into action. Youth leaders will gain an in-depth look into the challenges facing people with intellectual disabilities and how to equip themselves to influence change, drive impact and create results. These leaders will also hear from dynamic speakers including professional athletes, entrepreneurs and social innovators.  As part of the finale of this six-day Summit, the top five impact projects will pitch to a star-studded panel of judges, who will select a project to mentor based on the level of innovation and potential impact on generating acts of inclusion in their community.  The session will end with a presentation of the Generation Unified Manifesto, which is a declaration of social change by the youth leaders of Generation Unified.  A complete listing of judges and all sessions will be detailed closer to the Summit.

The selection criteria for each project submitted included:

* A project that must generate acts of inclusion to engage people with and without intellectual disabilities
* A project that must meaningfully engage Special Olympics athletes and/or other people with intellectual disabilities in the community throughout the design and implementation of the project
* A project that must have specific and measurable results
* Project applicants who embody strong leadership qualities

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## Special Olympics Kicks-Off Historic Unified Relay Across America Presented by Bank of America

###### **May 26, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.** - Special Olympics announced today the official kick-off of the first [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/) presented by Bank of America.   The Unified Relay gives anyone in the country the once-in-a-lifetime chance to carry the Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* and help deliver it to Los Angeles, California for the start of the [2015 Special Olympics World Games](http://www.la2015.org/) on 25 July.

Over the course of 46 days, in this team and individual fundraising event, thousands of participants are running, walking or biking a segment of the Unified Relay, as the torch passes in a hand-to-hand exchange through all 50 states. The Relay will culminate at the Opening Ceremony of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles on 25 July. ESPN, the official global broadcast partner of the World Games, will be on site from Los Angeles to televise the Opening Ceremony live as well as a nightly highlights program throughout the nine-day event.  ESPN and ABC are also the official media partners of the Unified Relay.

*The Flame of Hope* was lit on 14 May in a [formal torch lighting ceremony](http://www.specialolympics.org/Press/2015/The_Special_Olympics_Flame_of_Hope_is_Ignited_in_Athens.aspx) in Athens, Greece. Today, it will continue its journey when three torches will be lit in Augusta, Maine, Washington, D.C., and Miami, Florida, officially launching the Unified Relay. All three routes will travel west and become unified in Los Angeles on 10 July.

"Today marks a historic event for our organization - this Relay is unifying our nation and giving communities across the United States the unprecedented opportunity to carry the *Flame of Hope*, leading up to our World Games in Los Angeles," said Special Olympics CEO Janet Froetscher.  "Through our partnerships with Bank of America, ESPN, ABC and all of our other great Relay partners, we are able to bring awareness of the skills and abilities of people with ID to all communities and towns in the United States so that even more people are aware of the significant impact our athletes make each and every day.  Being able to share our athletes' stories across the nation for 46 days leading up to our World Games, and encouraging everyone to tune in to ESPN July 25 - August 2 to see our World Games wouldn't be possible without our partners."

In Augusta, Maine, Governor Paul LaPage, elite game wardens from North Woods Law and Special Olympics Pennsylvania athlete and Unified Relay co-captain Johanna Schoeneck will help kick off the celebrations at the State Capitol.  In Washington, D.C. at the National Sylvan Theatre near the Washington Monument, Assistant Secretary of State for Education and Cultural Affairs Evan Ryan will join Musical Artist Andra Day, Miss District of Columbia USA Lizzy Olsen and Special Olympics Iowa athlete and Unified Relay co-captain Corey Leonhard to kick off the central leg of the Relay. In Miami, at Marlins Stadium, Marlins players will join actor and VIP Torchbearer Geovanni Gopradi and Special Olympics North Carolina athlete and Unified Relay co-captain Zach Commander to kick off the southern route of the Relay.  Additionally, co-captain and WWE® Superstar Big Show® will represent WWE as part of the company's support as Promotional Partner of the Unified Relay Across America.  Three-time Grammy nominated tropical group Tiempo Libre will perform songs from their new album, Panamericano.

As the Relay enters each state, welcoming ceremonies and community celebrations will take place nightly with musical performances, celebrity guests and Unified Sports Experiences, where people with and without intellectual disabilities can play exhibition sports together.  [Olympic medalists](http://www.specialolympics.org/Press/2015/Olympic_Medalists_Challenge_Olympians_and_Peers_to_Participate_in_the_Unified_Relay_Across_America.aspx) from across the world will join Special Olympics Unified Relay partners, actors, musicians, professional athletes, lawmakers, members of law enforcement and the public to participate in the Relay.  Some noteworthy stops on the Relay route include: four Major League ballparks in Baltimore, Atlanta, Kansas City and Los Angeles; a must-see Fourth of July celebration in Las Vegas; plus stops at the NASCAR Hall of Fame in North Carolina; Epcot at the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida; ESPN's world headquarters in Bristol, CT; Minnesota's Mall of America; Chicago's Navy Pier; and San Antonio's Morgan's Wonderland, an amusement park created for people with disabilities. To tune in to see the torch's journey across the country, click on [http://www.unifiedrelay.org](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/) to find out when the Relay will come to your community.

In its role as presenting sponsor, Bank of America is providing significant financial and volunteer support to the Unified Relay. In addition, the company is using its connections in local communities to encourage participation among individuals, families and businesses.

"By supporting Special Olympics in a nationwide relay, we're bringing cross-country awareness to one of our longtime partners," said Anne Finucane, Bank of America global chief strategy and marketing officer and a member of the Special Olympics Board of Directors. "We're excited to not only support this historic event, but also to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to carry the *Flame of Hope* as we demonstrate our commitment to inclusion."

When the three relay routes arrive in Los Angeles, the World Games [Law Enforcement Torch Run](http://www.letr-council.org/) Final Leg Team, comprised of law enforcement officers representing 36 countries, along with 10 Special Olympics athletes, will accept the torches and continue the *Flame of Hope's* journey to 120 cities and towns throughout California, including Host Towns where Special Olympics World Games delegations from more than 170 countries will participate in pre-Games cultural exchanges.

Each Unified Relay route is led by a group of co-captains who will serve as spokespeople for the Special Olympics movement and the Unified Relay, encouraging participation through registration, fundraising and spectatorship.

The Unified Relay co-captains are: Damian Lillard, Special Olympics Global Ambassador and American professional basketball star; Elena Delle Donne, Special Olympics Global Ambassador and American professional basketball star; Joe Haden, Special Olympics Global Ambassador and American professional football star; Big Show of Unified Relay promotional partner WWE; Maria Menounos, Special Olympics Global Ambassador and journalist; Nancy O'Dell, American television host and entertainment journalist; Mike Golic and Mike Greenberg, co-hosts of the ESPN radio broadcast, "Mike and Mike in the Morning"; Aloe Blacc, American singer and songwriter; Josh Turner, American singer and actor; Special Olympics North Carolina athlete Zach Commander; Special Olympics Pennsylvania athlete Johanna Schoeneck; and Special Olympics Iowa athlete Corey Leonhard.

Throughout the 46 days, ESPN and ABC media will tell the story of the Relay across its multiple media platforms, covering and promoting each of the three routes as they cross the country. It will include national coverage on ESPN and ABC programs at select stops throughout the Relay, local coverage on ABC affiliates along the routes, a "Countdown to LA2015" clock on ESPN.com and select ABC digital media, and promotion across ESPN web sites and radio stations as well as ABC affiliate stations - letting people know when the torch is coming to their town and where they can go to support the torch bearers.

ESPN has been a supporter of Special Olympics for more than 30 years. In addition to its media roles with the World Games and Unified Relay, ESPN and the Walt Disney Company are global presenting sponsors for the worldwide Special Olympics Unified Sports initiative.

## Law Enforcement Torch Run® to Carry Special Olympics Flame of Hope to 2015 Special Olympics World Games Opening Ceremony

###### **May 19, 2015**

The 2015 Special Olympics World Games ([LA2015](http://www.la2015.org/)) celebrates the Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* arriving in the United States today to continue its journey of 6,890 miles to California. It will arrive on July 25 when the final leg of the Law Enforcement Torch Run® ([LETR](http://www.letr.org/)) for Special Olympics team carries it into the Opening Ceremony of the 2015 World Games and it ignites the cauldron at the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum,  site of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games' Opening Ceremonies.

"For more than 30 years, the Law Enforcement Torch Run has been an integral part of the Special Olympics Movement," said Patrick McClenahan, LA2015 President and CEO. "We look forward to seeing Californians cheering on the runners as they bring the World Games message of acceptance and inclusion throughout the state."

The [Law Enforcement Torch Run](http://www.letr.org/)® for Special Olympics is Special Olympics' largest grass-roots fundraiser and public awareness vehicle in the world. More than 90,000 law enforcement members in all 50 U.S. States, 12 Canadian provinces/territories, and 44 other countries contribute to LETR efforts annually as Guardians of the Flame**®**, ensuring the delivery of the Special Olympics *Flame of Hope*  to the Opening Ceremonies of local Special Olympics competitions, state/provincial Games, and national/regional Games.

The LETR Final Leg for the 2015 World Games is being presented by Bank of America and will take place from July 13-July 25 featuring three routes that will all merge in Los Angeles for the start of the 2015 World Games. The Final Leg will include a total distance of 4,648 miles, where the LETR team will start out from Sacramento and embark on three separate routes. A team of 126 members - which includes 98 law enforcement officer runners, 10 Special Olympics athletes, and logistics personnel - will serve as Guardians of the Flame as they run the *Flame of Hope* through 120 cities across California at various events. Law Enforcement runners from around the world are selected to represent their Torch Run and Special Olympics Programs in the Final Leg. The Special Olympics athletes were selected to be a part of the Final Leg Team based on nominations received from around the world.

"The Final Leg event is an amazing opportunity for law enforcement officers from around the world who work tirelessly year-round in support of Special Olympics, not only to help build excitement for the World Games and create awareness for Special Olympics, but also to showcase and highlight the skills and abilities of their teammates, ten (10) Special Olympics athletes from around the world on this unified team," said John Newnan, Team Captain for the Final Leg Team. "These athletes, along with their partners in law enforcement, will tell their personal 'stories' at over 119 ceremonies, helping to bring awareness, understanding and acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities to cities and towns throughout California that we will visit during the 14 days of the Final Leg event. We draw our strength, inspiration and motivation from the athletes and are proud to be a part of a movement called the Law Enforcement Torch Run that is the largest grass-roots fundraiser for Special Olympics worldwide."

For more details and to see the route map, visit [www.LETR-FinalLeg.org.](http://letr-finalleg.org/)

The World Games will be hosted for nine days from July 25-August 2 and feature 25 Olympic-type sports: Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cycling, Equestrian, Football, Golf, Gymnastics, Half Marathon, Handball, Judo, Kayaking, Open Water Swimming, Powerlifting, Roller Skating, Sailing, Softball, Table Tennis, Tennis, Triathlon, Volleyball, and Beach Volleyball. These Games will showcase the unlimited potential of people with intellectual disabilities - the largest disability population in the world.

The Opening Ceremony will take place at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Saturday, July 25, 2015 and will be televised to a worldwide audience by ESPN. To learn more, visit [LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/). For volunteer information, including becoming a Fan in the Stands, visit[LA2015.org/volunteer/fans-in-the-stands](http://www.la2015.org/volunteer/fans-in-the-stands).

## The Special Olympics Flame of Hope is Ignited in Athens

###### **May 14, 2015**

**Athens, Greece** - On Thursday, 14 May the Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* for the [Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015](http://www.la2015.org/) (LA 2015) was lit during a formal torch lighting ceremony. The torch was lit by the sun's rays at the Sacred Site of Pnyx, opposite the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.  Present at the ceremony were H.E. President of the Hellenic Republic Prokopios Pavlopoulos, Special Olympics CEO Janet Froetscher, Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015 (LA2015) President and CEO Patrick McClenahan, Special Olympics Hellas President Joanna Despotopoulou, Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Final Leg Team members, Team Special Olympics Hellas and hundreds more dignitaries and guests.

"In just 73 days, this *Flame of Hope* will ignite the cauldron in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the site of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games, "said Patrick McClenahan, LA2015 President and CEO.  "It will signify the start of the largest event Los Angeles has hosted since 1984, the largest sports and humanitarian event in the world this year, and, we believe, one of the most inspirational events of all time."

After the *Flame of Hope* was lit, Patrick McClenahan handed the torch to Final Leg Team member and Special Olympics Southern California athlete Brett Laza and Special Olympics Hellas athlete Theano Dilaveraki. Members of law enforcement along with Special Olympics athletes then carried the *Flame of Hope* through the streets of Athens to the residence of US Ambassador David Pearce, where a ceremony was held. Following the events, the *Flame of Hope* was entrusted to the Presidential Guard for safekeeping until it begins its journey to the United States.

The *Flame of Hope* will then begin its trans-Atlantic journey via UPS Airlines, which will transport the *Flame of Hope* to Washington, D.C., in time for the start of the Special Olympics [Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/), which will kick-off on 26 May.  The *Flame of Hope's* journey aboard a UPS aircraft begins in Athens, Greece on 18 May, followed by a stopover at the UPS hub at Cologne Bonn Airport in Germany then continuing on to Philadelphia, USA and arriving on 19 May, when the flame will then be transferred to a UPS alternative fuel vehicle to travel to the Special Olympics headquarters offices in Washington, D.C.

Once the *Flame of Hope* arrives in Washington, D.C., members of law enforcement will continue their role as the *Guardians of the Flame* and will light three torches that will be taken across the United States in three simultaneous routes starting on 26 May in Augusta, Maine; Miami, Florida; and Washington, D.C.  The *Flame of Hope* will visit communities in all 50 states as part of the Unified Relay Across America, where people will be invited to run, walk and bike with the *Flame of Hope* in a hand-to-hand exchange relay.  Traveling west, all three routes will become unified in Los Angeles on 10 July. Along each route, welcoming ceremonies and community celebrations will take place nightly with musical performances, celebrity guests and Unified Sports Experiences.  At the conclusion of the Unified Relay, the *Flame of Hope* will be handed over to the 2015 Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics Final Leg Team, it will travel for 13 days to more than 120 cities and towns throughout California, honoring the spirit of the Special Olympics global movement and delivering a message of hope to communities where people with intellectual disabilities continue to fight for acceptance and inclusion.

The relay will culminate at the Opening Ceremony of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles on 25 July. ESPN, the official broadcast partner of the World Games, will televise the Opening Ceremony live as well as a nightly highlights program throughout the nine-day event.

The Final Leg Team (126 members strong) is comprised of law enforcement runners, Special Olympics athletes, and Logistics Team members from 49 states and  24 countries around the world representing 79 Torch Run programs.  Final Leg runners were chosen for their dedication and commitment to the Law Enforcement Torch Run and Special Olympics by their respective Torch Run Programs throughout the world. For more information on the Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg for the 2015 Los Angeles World Games, please contact Final Leg Committee Chairman and Team Captain John Newnan at [final.leg@gmail.com](mailto:final.leg@gmail.com).

Every two years, thousands of Special Olympics athletes worldwide come together to showcase their athletic skills and celebrate the spirit of Special Olympics in alternating World Summer and World Winter Games.  The first Special Olympics World Games took place in 1968 and since then have evolved into a world-class sporting event, attracting a wide range of sponsors, supporters and media. Special Olympics World Games bring public attention to the talents and capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities and are a capstone to more than 81,000 competitions that happen at all levels of Special Olympics each year.

For more information about the upcoming 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games, please visit the Games' official website at [www.LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/).

## Special Olympics World Games Commemorated on Forever Stamp

###### **May 08, 2015**

**Irvine, California** - The U.S. Postal Service begins celebrating the 2015 Special Olympics World Games by issuing the Special Olympics World Games Forever stamp during the Special Olympics Southern California 2015 Orange County Spring Regional Games in Irvine tomorrow. The stamp will be available nationwide May 9.

As the flagship event of the Special Olympics movement, the Special Olympics World Games will be held in Los Angeles from July 25 - Aug. 2. More than half a million spectators will enjoy nine days of challenging and inspiring international competition as more than 7,000 athletes from 177 countries compete in 25 Olympic-type sports. The athletes will include 344 from the United States. Visit  [Special Olympics USA](http://specialolympicsusa.org/2015/athletes)  for the complete U.S. team listing.

Today, Special Olympics has grown to encompass nearly 5 million athletes worldwide. Every year, with the support of more than 1.3 million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics organizes more than 81,000 games and competitions. The 2015 Special Olympics World Games will showcase what Special Olympics is accomplishing every day, around the world.

"The Postal Service is pleased to honor Special Olympics, an organization that - for nearly five decades - has changed the world by creating opportunities for children and adults with intellectual disabilities," said USPS Pacific Area Vice President Dean Granholm. "In doing so, we honor the important work of Special Olympics, which uses sports as the catalyst for societal change in the areas of health, education, and in creating communities of acceptance and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities everywhere. Using these stamps on your cards, letters and packages is a great way to show your support for these athletes."

Scheduled to join Granholm in dedicating the stamps will be Special Olympics Southern California Orange County Athlete of the Year Tony Briones; Special Olympics Southern California Board Chairman Tim Redmond; Special Olympics Southern California President and CEO Bill Shumard; Irvine Police Department Commander Mike Hallinan; and Irvine Mayor Steven Choi.

"Special Olympics changed my life and the lives of many of my friends and their families," said Briones. "It helps us to learn compassion and leadership skills while bringing fun, accomplishment and pride into our lives. The stamp makes us feel important and we thank the Postal Service for extending Special Olympics this honor."

**The Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles Logo**

The Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles logo was donated by the Davis Elen advertising agency*.* Taking center stage is the celebratory figure that represents the joy the athletes feel when they compete. The multi-colored circle around the celebratory figure represents inclusion for all people with intellectual disabilities. The 19 colors of the logo are made up of the analogous colors derived from the flags of the 177 countries competing, with the shape of the color pieces being a nod to the Hollywood klieg lights that are commonly used in the host city of Los Angeles. [View the video of the making of thelogo](http://www.la2015.org/about-la2015/sponsors/davis-elen).   
  
**The Stamp Design**  
  
The stamp features the 2015 Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles logo, showcasing the colors of flags from participating countries. "The logo's celebratory figure represents the courage, determination and joy of our athletes," said President and CEO of the 2015 World Games Patrick McClenahan. "Placing the iconic image inside the circle represents acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities." Art director Greg Breeding of Charlottesville, VA, designed the stamp for the Postal Service.  
  
**The Stamp**  
  
The Special Olympics World Games stamp is being issued as a Forever stamp. Forever stamps are always equal in value to the current First-Class Mail  1-ounce price.

Fifty million Special Olympics World Games Forever stamps were produced. Customers may purchase the stamps at [usps.com/stamps](http://www.usps.com/stamps), the [Postal Store](https://store.usps.com/store/browse/productDetailSingleSku.jsp?productId=S_519904), at 800-STAMP24 (800-782-6724) and at Post Offices nationwide or visit [ebay.com/stamps](http://www.ebay.com/stamps) to shop for a wide variety of postage stamps and collectibles

## 2015 Special Olympics World Games partners with Herbalife

###### **April 28, 2015**

**LOS ANGELES, April 28, 2015** - Today, LA2015, the Organizing Committee for the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, and global nutrition company Herbalife announced a partnership that will assist in meeting the nutritional needs of 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches from 177 countries during their nine days in Los Angeles for the Games, July 25-August 2, 2015.

In its role as a Games Supplier, Herbalife will support World Games participants and attendees, providing 300,000 nutrition bars to athletes, coaches, staff, volunteers, families program and honored guests at all sports venues and general dining areas. Additionally, Herbalife's Los Angeles Distribution Center in Carson will serve as the organizing committee's Uniform Distribution and Credentialing Center (UDAC), and volunteer registration hub.

"Herbalife is a global company that shares our commitment to health, diversity and community," said Patrick McClenahan, President and CEO of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games.  "Through its network of members in 90 countries, Herbalife will bring awareness to our mission of acceptance and inclusion."

To kick off the partnership, LA Galaxy players Omar Gonzalez and Jaime Penedo today faced off in a mini soccer match with Special Olympics Southern California (SOSC) players.  They were cheered on by Herbalife independent members and employees. Herbalife is a nutrition sponsor of the LA Galaxy team, fueling the team's last three MLS Cup wins in 2011, 2012 and 2014.

"We are proud to be a Games Supplier and to partner with an organization that embodies the positive impact of living a healthy active life," said Michael O. Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer, Herbalife. "We welcome the Special Olympics World Games to Los Angeles and we are excited to play our part in such an important event in bringing good nutrition to athletes, coaches, and volunteers throughout the games."

The World Games will feature 25 Olympic-style sports: Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cycling, Equestrian, Football, Golf, Gymnastics, Half Marathon, Handball, Judo, Kayaking, Open Water Swimming, Powerlifting, Roller Skating, Sailing, Softball, Table Tennis, Tennis, Triathlon, Volleyball, and Beach Volleyball. These Games will showcase the unlimited potential of people with intellectual disabilities - the largest disability population in the world.

The Opening Ceremony will take place at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Saturday, July 25, and will be televised to a worldwide audience by ESPN. To learn more, visit [www.LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/). For volunteer information, including becoming a Fan in the Stands, visit[http://www.LA2015.org/volunteer](http://www.la2015.org/volunteer).

## Toyota Celebrates the Journey to the Games

###### **April 16, 2015**

**Los Angeles** - Now just 100 days away from the Opening Ceremony, Toyota, the Official Automotive Partner of the [2015 Special Olympics World Games](http://www.la2015.org/), rolled out its national and local programs today, furthering its commitment to the World Games. Toyota and its network of dealerships across the U.S. have committed to raising funds to support athletes and their journey to the World Games in Los Angeles.

"This is an incredible opportunity to support a truly global event and we're taking a holistic approach, from our sponsorship investment at the national level, support vehicles and engaging local fundraising efforts across the country to the hundreds of Toyota employees who will volunteer at the World Games," said Jim Lentz, CEO of Toyota North America. "The world is coming to Los Angeles and we are proud to join the Special Olympics World Games and support our shared values of acceptance and inclusion."

Also launching today is Toyota's Special Olympics World Games digital hub - "Journey to the Games", which will showcase Toyota's various activities leading up to the World Games this summer and throughout the Games itself. Fans can visit [ShareTheJourney.Toyota.com](http://www.sharethejourney.toyota.com/) to find athlete profiles and watch the Special Olympics Flame of Hope make its way to Los Angeles. People everywhere can participate in the conversation by using #ShareTheJourney in social media posts.

In support for what is expected to be the world's largest sports and humanitarian event in 2015, Toyota will also:

* Provide 400 vehicles to the World Games to help transport Honored Guests around Los Angeles
* Supply support vehicles for the *Special OlympicsUnified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America* as well as the *World Games'* *Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Final Leg* as the torch carrying the Flame of Hope makes its way to Los Angeles
* Partner with the Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles to create large scale murals across Los Angeles that celebrate the spirt of the Special Olympics World Games
* Launch and maintain its own online hub where fans can engage with the Games and share stories from across the globe

In addition to activating dealerships nationwide to help Special Olympics USA's journey to the Games, Toyota dealers can help promote Special Olympics and the 2015 World Games through in-store activations and events. Toyota dealer and Team Toyota NASCAR driver, Clint Bowyer is lending his support to the Games and the Toyota program.

"As a Toyota driver as well as a Toyota dealer in Emporia, Kansas, I am looking forward to the opportunity to help Special Olympics USA on its journey to the World Games," said Clint Bowyer. "Sports have always played an important role in my life and after meeting a few of these athletes earlier this year, I know they are ready to show the world what they are made of!"

The World Games are the flagship event for the Special Olympics Movement. Every other year, the World Games alternate between Summer and Winter Games. More than 7,000 athletes, 177 represented countries and 30,000 volunteers are expected to participate in the Games this summer, taking place in Los Angeles from July 25 through August 2. Although this is Toyota's first time sponsoring the World Games, the company has an almost 30-year history with Special Olympics Southern California. Toyota is committed to making its communities better places to live, and the Special Olympics World Games partnership is one of those important efforts. More information on the World Games can be found online at [www.LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/).

## 2015 Special Olympics World Games Celebrates "100 Days Away"

###### **April 16, 2015**

**LOS ANGELES, April 16, 2015** - 100 days from today, more than 7,000 athletes from 177 countries will assemble in Los Angeles on Saturday, July 25, for the start of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, the first time in 16 years that the United States has hosted the summer edition of the World Games. The World Games will be the largest sports and humanitarian event anywhere in the world in this year, and the single biggest event in Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games, with more than 500,000 spectators expected to cheer on the global competitors.

To commemorate this significant milestone and begin the countdown to the Opening Ceremony at the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum - the same venue that hosted both the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games - the LA2015 Games Organizing Committee is unveiling the World Games medals and distinction ribbons. To celebrate this occasion, Special Olympics athletes and Olympic champions are gathering today at the LA84 Foundation headquarters, featuring Olympic gold medalists with a combined number of 10 gold medals including Julie Foudy (two gold medals in women's soccer), Greg Louganis (four gold medals in diving) and John Naber (four gold medals in swimming). Additional speakers include former Los Angeles Mayor and LA2015 board member, Antonio Villaraigosa, LA84 President and two-time Olympian, Anita L. DeFrantz, and LA2015 President and CEO, Patrick McClenahan.

"Today is an exciting moment as in just 100 days, Los Angeles will welcome athletes from around the world as they strive to be the best that they can be with courage, determination and joy," said Patrick McClenahan. "I know Los Angeles and all of Southern California will cheer on these incredible athletes at this once-in-a-lifetime event."

The World Games gold, silver and bronze medals and distinction ribbons featuring the 19 colors of the World Games logo will be given out to athletes competing in their respective sports. More than 15,000 medals and 15,000 distinction ribbons will be produced for the Games by MTM Recognition of Oklahoma City, a long-standing partner of Special Olympics.

**Additional 100 Days Away celebrations include:**

* Local events in World Games Host Towns, where athletes from around the world will be welcomed for three days prior to the World Games to more than 100+ Southern California communities from San Luis Obispo to San Diego;
* "Circle of Inclusion" photo opportunities and social media sharing @LA2015 #ReachUpLA; consumers can also download the just released World Games App, including a Circle of Inclusion filter from the Apple Store or Google Play;
* Lighting of the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) Pylons in the World Games colors at sunset, around 7:25 pm;
* Lighting of the Pacific Wheel Ferris wheel in the World Games colors at the Santa Monica Pier, the world's only solar-powered Ferris wheel standing 130 feet above the Pacific Ocean, from sunset to midnight;

The World Games will be hosted for nine days from July 25-August 2 and feature 25 Olympic-type sports: Aquatics, Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cycling, Equestrian, Football, Golf, Gymnastics, Half Marathon, Handball, Judo, Kayaking, Open Water Swimming, Powerlifting, Roller Skating, Sailing, Softball, Table Tennis, Tennis, Triathlon, Volleyball, and Beach Volleyball. These Games will showcase the unlimited potential of people with intellectual disabilities - the largest disability population in the world.

The Opening Ceremony will take place at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Saturday, July 25, 2015 and will be televised to a worldwide audience by ESPN. To learn more, visit [LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/). For volunteer information, including becoming a Fan in the Stands, visit[LA2015.org/volunteer/fans-in-the-stands](http://www.la2015.org/volunteer/fans-in-the-stands).

# Toys“R”Us® In-Store Campaign Raises More than $2 Million to Benefit Special Olympics

###### **April 16, 2015**

**Wayne, N.J.** - Toys"R"Us ® today announced that a recent campaign hosted in its stores across the U.S. and online at Toysrus.com to benefit Special Olympics raised more than $2 million. Throughout the duration of the eight-week awareness and fundraising program, Toys"R"Us customers pledged their support to help children with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience #MyFirstSportsMoment by learning how to hit balls, run bases, take jump shots and more through Special Olympics. One hundred percent of customer donations will be directed to Special Olympics and applied towards the upcoming 2015 World Games, as well as the expansion of the Young Athletes™ Program around the world. Additionally, the company celebrated the youngest Special Olympics athletes on its official social media channels, including [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/toysrus), [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvneq_xhmbJALH0QL4ZPqCA), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ToysRUs) and [Instagram](http://instagram.com/toysrus), where fans and followers shared their #MyFirstSportsMoment memories and experiences.

In conjunction with this campaign, the Toys"R"Us Children's Fund made a $1.25 million commitment to serve as a Games Sponsor of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, which in just 100 days, will welcome 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches representing 177 countries, to Los Angeles, CA from July 25 to August 2. As part of the expanded partnership between Toys"R"Us and Special Olympics, the Toys"R"Us Children's Fund also awarded a $500,000 grant to the organization to advance its aggressive five-year plan to grow the Young Athletes Program in the U.S. and across the globe, so 2½ to 7 year olds everywhere can build critical physical, cognitive, and sports skills through the power of play.

"We could not be more pleased with the outpouring of support by our loyal customers for Special Olympics," said Kathleen Waugh, Chairman of the Toys"R"Us Children's Fund. "These customer donations, combined with grants from the Toys"R"Us Children's Fund, provided a significant contribution of nearly $4 million to Special Olympics to advance the organization's efforts to bring the benefit of sports to kids of all abilities. As the 100-day countdown to the 2015 World Games commences, we're eager to celebrate these children who will experience their very first sports moment on a grand stage."

"Special Olympics and Toys"R"Us have a tremendous legacy of working together and we're thrilled to be expanding our relationship on such a global scale," said Janet Froetscher, CEO, Special Olympics. "The Toys"R"Us 'My First' initiative will allow us to reach more young athletes and provide them the opportunity to experience the transformative power and joy of sports."

For many years, the Toys"R"Us Children's Fund, a public charity affiliated with the company, has directed grants to Special Olympics to support the organization's Young Athletes Program. Most recently, it provided $1 million to become the first Founding Partner of the 2014 Special Olympics USA Games held in New Jersey, and with an additional $250,000 grant, was also Presenting Sponsor of the Law Enforcement Torch Run Final Leg for those Games.

For more information about the company's ongoing commitment to Special Olympics, including the upcoming World Games in Los Angeles, please visit [Toysrus.com/SpecialOlympics.](http://www.toysrus.com/shop/index.jsp?categoryId=22293686)

## Avril Lavigne Releases New Single "Fly" and Music Video to Benefit Special Olympics

###### **April 16, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.** - International, award-winning musician and philanthropist Avril Lavigne debuted her song "Fly" to benefit Special Olympics today.  The song is exclusively available today, April 16, on iTunes (<http://smarturl.it/avrilflysingle>) 100 days before the start of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, which will be the world's largest sporting event in 2015, and will take place July 25-August 2 in Los Angeles. The inspiring music video for "Fly", debuted today on ABC's Good Morning America, featuring Avril Lavigne and Special Olympics athletes from around the world.  
  
"This song means a lot to me personally," says Lavigne. "It is inspired by the many young people I've met throughout my work with my Foundation. They pursue their dreams no matter what obstacles they face." The Avril Lavigne Foundation provides support to children and youth living with serious illnesses or disabilities. "Special Olympics' mission is to unleash the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sports, so they're a natural fit for this song."   
  
In September 2014, as part of the Avril Lavigne Foundation's support for Special Olympics, Avril launched a campaign for her 30th birthday, which raised funds to support 30 Special Olympics athletes competing in the 2015 Special Olympics World Games. During her 2014 World Tour, Avril visited a local Special Olympics Program in Shanghai to learn more about their work, and met with and invited more than 200 Special Olympics athletes to her shows in 14 countries.   
  
Lavigne co-wrote "Fly" with her husband Chad Kroeger and David Hodges. The track was produced by Avril Lavigne and Chris Baseford, mixed by Chris Lord-Alge at Mix LA with assistance from Keith Armstrong and Nik Karpen, with additional engineering from Andrew Schubert and Adam Chagnon, engineered by Chris Baseford, and mastered by Ted Jensen. Special thanks to Epic Records, a division of Sony Music Entertainment. The track also features violin by Slovakian sensation Filip Jančík, who is known for melding rock and pop with classical violin.   
  
The music video for "Fly" was directed by Avril Lavigne and Robb Dipple (who also provided photography direction), produced by Lisa Lax & Nancy Stern, edited by Ray Conley and associate produced by Brittany Futterknecht.   
  
"Fly" will also be featured during Special Olympics' first-ever Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America event, where over the course of 46 days, over 20,000 participants nationwide will carry the Flame of Hope to Los Angeles for the Special Olympics World Games.  The relay will kick off May 26th in Augusta, Maine; Miami, Florida; and Washington, D.C. and end on July 10th.  Along each route, nightly celebrations will take place with musical performances, celebrity guests and Unified Sports Experiences (where people with and without intellectual disabilities play on the same team together).  Every night, during each community celebration, Avril's song will be played when the torch arrives into the city.  For more information on the relay, visit [www.unifiedrelay.org](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/). And for more information about the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, visit [www.LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/).

## ESPN Announces Initial Coverage Team and Plans for Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015

###### **April 16, 2015**

**Bristol, Connecticut -**ESPN, the official media partner of the [Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015](http://www.la2015.org/) (LA2015), today announced its initial coverage team and plans for the event that will begin July 25 with live coverage of the Opening Ceremony at 9 p.m. ET.  Additionally, Mike Greenberg and Mike Golic will serve as co-captains during the [Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America,](http://www.specialolympics.org/Press/2015/Unified_Relay_Across_America_Announcement.aspx) participating and supporting the relay that will carry the Flame of Hope as it travels along three simultaneous cross-country routes and meet in Los Angeles for the World Games.

**ESPN & ABC coverage of the Special Olympics World Games LA2015**

ESPN's coverage will include the three-hour live telecast of the Opening Ceremony and nightly studio programs from Los Angeles throughout the week-long event. Coverage will air primarily on ESPN, with some programs appearing on ABC or ESPN2. All ESPN and ESPN2 programs will also being simulcast on WatchESPN.

Robin Roberts, co-host of ABC's *Good Morning America*, will join ESPN's Lindsey Czarniak and Kevin Negandhi for coverage of the Opening Ceremonies, while Czarniak and Neghandi will host nightly programs throughout the World Games LA2015.  Award-winning ESPN reporters Jeremy Schaap and Marty Smith will contribute features and reporting throughout ESPN's week-long coverage and ESPN's Holly Rowe will follow the Special Olympics USA team throughout the day of the Opening Ceremony. Additionally, Dustin Plunkett, a Special Olympics Global Messenger, athlete and Board Member of LA2015 and Special Olympics Southern California, will contribute to ESPN's coverage.

"The Special Olympics World Games is a truly compelling event, filled with some of the most extraordinary sports stories and people you will ever see, and we are looking forward to showcasing them," said Russell Wolff, Executive Vice President, ESPN International. "Sports has the power to be unifying, uplifting and life-changing, and this event will be a remarkable and tangible example of that power."

Added Negandhi, "It's an honor to be a part of such an amazing event featuring athletes from around the world. I had the chance to personally witness their love and passion for sport and competition at last year's southern California Special Olympics Summer Games Invitational and at this year's NBA All Star Weekend. It blew me away. It was an opportunity for full inclusion and the joy on everyone's faces, from the athletes to their families to the volunteers, was unmatched. I can't wait to showcase that joy during our broadcasts on ESPN this summer."

Live coverage of the Opening Ceremony will capture the full pageantry of the multiple performances, torch lighting and Parade of Athletes at the Los Angeles Coliseum, as well as interviews, features and reports from Los Angeles.  ESPN's nightly studio programs will deliver stories, vignettes and features from around the World Games, as well as recapping the key results from each days' competitions.

ESPN's coverage of will also be delivered to millions of fans around the world, both on ESPN networks and through syndication partners.  It will appear on ESPN networks and media platforms in the U.S., Mexico, Spanish-speaking Latin America, the Caribbean, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.  Special Olympics, ESPN and the World Games Organizing Committee are together identifying additional regional media partners to bring the World Games to as many fans and sports participants around the world as possible.

With 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches representing 177 countries, along with 30,000 volunteers and an anticipated 500,000 spectators, the 2015 Special Olympics World Games - being staged in Los Angeles July 25 - August 2, 2015 - will be the single biggest event in Los Angeles since the 1984 Olympic Games.  The 2015 Special Olympics World Games, with the unparalleled spirit, enthusiasm, teamwork, joy and displays of courage and skill that are hallmarks of all Special Olympics events, will feature 25 Olympic-style sports in venues throughout the Los Angeles region.  The Opening Ceremony, to be held July 25, 2015 in the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, site of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games, is expected to attract 80,000 spectators.

**Special Olympics World Games LA2015 Schedule**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day/Date** | **Program** | **Time (ET)** | **Network** |
| Saturday, July 25 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 Opening Ceremony\* | 9 p.m. | ESPN \* |
| Sunday, July 26 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN2 |
| Monday, July 27 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Tuesday, July 28 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Wednesday, July 29 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Thursday, July 30 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN2 |
| Friday, July 31 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN2 |
| Saturday, August 1 | ESPN on ABC Sports Saturday | 4 p.m. | ABC |
| Saturday, August 1 | Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Friday, August 7 | Best of Special Olympics World Games LA2015 & Closing Ceremony | 7 p.m. | ESPN |
| Saturday, August 8 | ABC Sports Saturday - Best of Special Olympics World Games LA2015 | 4pm | ABC |

*Notes:*  
*All shows will re-air on ESPN2 later the same night.*  
*\* KABC in Los Angeles will re-air the Opening Ceremony coverage immediately following ESPN (9p.m.-12.a.m. PT)*

*Mike & Mike***to be co-captains in Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America**

ESPN's Mike Greenberg and Mike Golic, hosts of *Mike & Mike* on ESPN Radio, simulcast on ESPN2, will participate as co-captains in the first-ever [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America](http://www.specialolympics.org/Press/2015/Unified_Relay_Across_America_Announcement.aspx). In the role, they will participate in a segment of the Relay, helping to carry the torch and deliver the*Flame of Hope* to Los Angeles for the Special Olympics World Games LA2015 while also raising awareness of the opportunity for anyone to take part.

It was previously announced that John Skipper, President, ESPN, Inc. and Co-Chairman, Disney Media Networks, is among a [group of corporate leaders who will also participate in The Unified Relay Across America](http://www.specialolympics.org/Press/2015/Corporate_Leaders_Challenge_Peers_in_Special_Olympics_Unified_Relay_Across_America.aspx).

The Unified Relay Across America will give anyone in the country a chance to carry the Flame of Hope, which will be lit in Athens, Greece, and help deliver it to Los Angeles for the Special Olympics World Games LA2015. 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.

Throughout the 46 days, ESPN and ABC media platforms will tell the story of the relay across its multiple media platforms, covering each of the three routes as they cross the country. It will include coverage on ESPN and ABC programs at select stops throughout the relay, media local coverage on ABC-owned stations and affiliates along the routes, and a "Countdown to LA2015" clock on ESPN.com and select ABC digital media, and promotion across ESPN web sites and radio stations as well as ABC affiliate stations - letting people know when the torch is coming to their town and where they can go to support the torch bearers.

The Unified Relay Across America gives 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.  Any person or group can get more information and sign up at: [www.unifiedrelay.org/](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/)

The relay will culminate at the Opening Ceremony of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles on July 25, 2015.

# Twenty World Champion Olympic Medalists Challenge Fellow Olympians and Peers to Participate in the First-Ever Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America

###### **April 16, 2015** **Washington, D.C.** - In anticipation of the upcoming Special Olympics World Summer Games to be held in Los Angeles this summer, 20 Olympic medalists across the world have come together to show  their support of Special Olympics by participating in the first-ever [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/). Leading the challenge is Olympic swimmer Donna de Varona, along with American gymnast Bart Conner, Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci, Russian-American artistic gymnast Nastia Liukin, American figure skaters Scott Hamilton and Michelle Kwan, American snowboarder Hannah Teter, American short track speed skater Apolo Ohno, American speed skater Casey FitzRandolph, American professional basketball players Sam Perkins and Ruth Riley, American swimmers John Naber and Jessica Hardy, American soccer player Kristine Lilly, American freestyle skier Ashley Caldwell, Swiss swimmer Dominik Meichtry, Paralympic athlete April Holmes,  American bobsledder Steven Holcomb and American ice hockey players Julie Chu and Jocelyne Lamoureux.

Through the Special Olympics Unified Relay Olympian Challenge, they have committed to running, biking or walking a segment in the upcoming Unified Relay Across America helping to carry the torch and deliver the*Flame of Hope,* the official torch for the Special Olympics World Games, to Los Angeles, and are challenging their fellow Olympians and peers across the world to participate.

"Please join me in supporting Special Olympics and the World Games by running in our Torch Relay," said de Varona.  "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take part and be a part of a very special gathering!"

For 46 days, from May 26 to July 10, in the first known torch relay to cross all 50 states, more than 20,000 participants will run, walk or bike over 10,000 segments of the relay. The Unified Relay is a team and individual fundraising event. Three simultaneous relay routes will cover almost 21,000 miles of the US, starting their individual journeys in Augusta, Maine, Miami, Florida and Washington, DC and unifying in Los Angeles.  Along each route, welcoming ceremonies and community celebrations will take place nightly with musical performances, celebrity guests and Unified Sports Experiences, where people with and without intellectual disabilities play on the same team.

When the three relays arrive in Los Angeles, the [Law Enforcement Torch Run](http://www.letr-council.org/) Final Leg Team, comprised of law enforcement officers representing 36 countries, along with 10 Special Olympics athletes, will accept the torches and continue the *Flame of Hope's* journey to communities throughout California, including Host Towns where Special Olympics World Games delegations from more than 170 countries will participate in pre-Games cultural exchanges.

Anyone can 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 in an area of interest across the United States. Funds raised from the Unified Relay will go to Special Olympics to provide sports training, competition opportunities and additional programming that empowers people with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all. 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/).

From July 25 - August 2 Special Olympics will hold its flagship event, the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles, CA, demonstrating sports excellence, which promotes equality, respect and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities around the world. Transcending the boundaries of geography, nationality, political philosophy, gender, age, culture and religion, the world will come together for the largest sporting and humanitarian event on the planet to see 7,000 athletes from 170 countries compete in 25 sports.

## Special Olympics Taps ReverbNation to Deliver Bands for Epic 129-city Tour Leading Up to the Special Olympics 2015 World Games

###### **April 14, 2015** **Washington D.C, North Carolina** - Special Olympics announced today that it is working with ReverbNation to select bands to perform at nearly 130 events across the United States as part of the [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/), leading up to the Special Olympics World Summer Games, which begins in Los Angeles on July 25, 2015.

The Unified Relay, presented by Bank of America, will span 46 days, from May 26 to July 10, in the first-known torch relay to cross all 50 states.  More than 20,000 participants will run, walk or bike a segment of the relay in this team and individual fundraising event, carrying the Special Olympics *Flame of Hope* across the country and helping to deliver it to Los Angeles for the Special Olympics World Games. The Unified Relay will include three simultaneous routes hitting all 50 states and will be led by celebrity and Special Olympics athlete co-captains and supported by law enforcement officers.  Everything kicks off on May 26th when participants begin their journey in three cities: Augusta, Maine; Miami, Florida and Washington, D.C.  Traveling west, torchbearers will be met each evening with a celebration that includes local Special Olympics athletes, city officials and entertainment by a ReverbNation artist.  A complete list of dates and cities can be found [HERE](https://www.reverbnation.com/submission/details?campaign_id=4715).

"ReverbNation has the access to great bands and the capability to help us program this many events," said Peter Wheeler, Chief of Strategic Properties for Special Olympics.  "We are excited to be teaming up with them on our first-ever Unified Relay Across America to provide each evening's entertainment in cities across America as we bring people together with this transformative event."

Thousands of ReverbNation bands have already submitted their music for consideration for this exciting event. Bands are encouraged to submit until April 24th when the submission window closes (the link to submit can be found [HERE](https://www.reverbnation.com/submission/details?campaign_id=4715)).  ReverbNation will leverage its curation-at-scale capability to select the bands to play for Special Olympics crowds in cities from Alexandria, VA to Wichita, KS, to Los Angeles, CA.

"Over the last year we have worked very hard to build a curation-at-scale platform that can match the right bands with the right audience for the right experience," said Mike Doernberg, Founder and CEO of ReverbNation.  "We are impressed with both the quantity and quality of the submissions we have received so far from great local bands all over the country.  Serving an important event such as the Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America confirms our belief in the growing importance of music across everyday experiences and our ability to connect artists to these opportunities."

Since its formation, ReverbNation has helped tens of thousands of artists, many of whom have gone on to achieve great success.  **Imagine Dragons**, **Alabama Shakes**, **Kacey Musgraves**, **Mac Miller**, **A$AP Rocky** and **Hunter Hayes**,  to name just a few, have used ReverbNation's platform to help establish themselves and grow their careers.

The Torch Arrival Ceremony on each tour stop will commence at approximately 5:30 p.m., depending on the arrival of the torch.  For more information please visit www.unifiedrelay.org.

## Corporate Leaders Challenge Peers to Participate in the First-Ever Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America

###### **April 13, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.** - In anticipation of the upcoming Special Olympics World Summer Games to be held in Los Angeles this summer, corporate leaders are showing their support of Special Olympics by participating in the first-ever [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/). Leading the challenge is Bank of America Global Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer Anne Finucane, along with The Coca-Cola Company Chairman and CEO Muhtar Kent; Finish Line Chairman and CEO Glenn Lyon; Mattel Chief Financial Officer Kevin Farr; John Skipper, President, ESPN, Inc. and Co-Chairman, Disney Media Networks; Donald A. Baer, Worldwide Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Burson-Marsteller; and Y&R Global CEO David Sable.

Through the Special Olympics Unified Relay C-Suite Challenge, they have committed to running a segment in the upcoming Unified Relay Across America helping to carry the torch and deliver the *Flame of Hope,* the official torch for the Special Olympics World Games, to Los Angeles, and are challenging other corporate executives across the country to participate.

"This summer we have an incredible opportunity to support people with intellectual disabilities by spreading a message of inclusion and respect for all," said Finucane. "I invite all business leaders to not only participate in the upcoming Unified Relay Across America, but to consider how they can include people with intellectual disabilities in the work place, and how they can reach them as customers."

For 46 days, from May 26 to July 10, in the first known torch relay to cross all 50 states, more than 20,000 participants will run, walk or bike over 10,000 segments of the relay. The Unified Relay is a team and individual fundraising event. Three simultaneous relay routes will cover almost 21,000 miles of the U.S., starting their individual journeys in Augusta, Maine, Miami, Florida and Washington, D.C. and unifying in Los Angeles.  Welcoming ceremonies and community celebrations will take place nightly along each route with musical performances, celebrity guests and Unified Sports Experiences, where people with and without intellectual disabilities play on the same team.

When the three relays arrive in Los Angeles, the [Law Enforcement Torch Run](http://www.letr-council.org/) Final Leg Team, comprised of law enforcement officers representing 36 countries, along with 10 Special Olympics athletes, will accept the torches and continue the *Flame of Hope's* journey to communities throughout California, including Host Towns where Special Olympics World Games delegations from more than 170 countries will participate in pre-Games cultural exchanges.

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 in an area of interest across the United States. Funds raised from the Unified Relay will go to Special Olympics to provide sports training, competition opportunities and additional programming that empowers people with intellectual disabilities to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all. 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/).

From July 25 - August 2 Special Olympics will hold its flagship event, the Special Olympics World Games, in Los Angeles, demonstrating sports excellence, which promotes equality, respect and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities around the world. Transcending the boundaries of geography, nationality, political philosophy, gender, age, culture and religion, the world will come together for the largest sporting and humanitarian event on the planet to see 7,000 athletes from 170 countries compete in 25 sports.

## Fourth Edition of Doha GOALS Forum to be Held in Los Angeles

###### **March 25, 2015**

**Doha, Qatar** - The fourth edition of Doha GOALS, the world’s leading platform focusing on sport as a driver of social and economic change, will be held in Los Angeles from July 25-27, 2015. Doha GOALS Forum will partner with Special Olympics this year for the three-day summit and legacy program.  
  
The 2015 edition Forum will debate topics such as women and young people in sport, philanthropy and CSR initiatives featuring sport, and sport’s role in promoting inclusion in society.  
  
The summit will be held during the week of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles – the first time the Forum has been held outside Qatar.   
  
Doha GOALS is a call to action for policymakers, NGOs, corporations and athletes alike. H.E. Sheikh Faisal bin Mubarak Al Thani, Executive Director of Doha GOALS, said: “This year, we have chosen to partner with Special Olympics, the world’s most wide-reaching organisation focusing on sport for development, especially to the most marginalized people on earth – people with intellectual disabilities. Our partnership will go beyond a presence at the World Games, and will cover initiatives to last year-round to promote sport as a tool for creating a more inclusive society.”  
  
Executive producer Richard Attias added: “After three years, we are very proud to bring Doha GOALS Forum to America. The Forum is truly becoming a platform for dialogue, providing inspiration for years to come. “  
  
A number of initiatives have been created through Doha GOALS in the past 24 months, including a programme to build sports fields in disadvantaged communities and a prosthetics programme backed by Paralympic champions.  
  
Janet Froetscher, Chief Executive Officer of Special Olympics, said: “We have spent more than four decades proving to the world that sport has the power to transform lives and communities. We are delighted to partner with Doha GOALS Forum this year: it is a platform that brings together global decision-makers with a clear agenda to act and make impact. The backdrop of our World Games offers the perfect opportunity for leaders to see first-hand the immediate and positive impact sport can have and the lasting legacy it can bring to creating an inclusive and respectful society.”  
  
To date, the Doha GOALS Forum has brought together more than 5,000 participants from 70 countries to discuss how sport can be used to solve some of the world’s greatest social and economic challenges.

## Maria Menounos Named Global Ambassador by Special Olympics

###### **March 23, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.**-  Menounos will support Special Olympics by leading a celebrity engagement campaign for the upcoming Special Olympics World Games and by promoting acceptance, inclusion and respect for people with intellectual disabilities. She will also serve as a co-captain on the just announced [Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/) that will kick off on May 26th.  
  
"I am honored and proud to raise awareness for Special Olympics as a Global Ambassador and I am thrilled to join the movement at such an exciting time," said Maria Menounos. "Fitness and sports are a vital part of my life and I find inspiration in the determination and spirit of the athletes of Special Olympics and I want the world to know that people with intellectual disabilities need to be included and respected in our society.”  
  
One of Menounos’ first actions will be leading a route of the Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America where the nation will be able to carry the torch and help deliver the Flame of Hope to the Special Olympics World Games. For 46 days, from May 26 to July 10, in the first known torch relay to cross all 50 states, over 20,000 participants will run, walk or bike over 10,000 segments of the relay. The Unified Relay is a team and individual fundraising event. Three simultaneous relay routes will cover almost 21,000 miles of the US, starting their individual journeys in Augusta, Maine, Miami, Florida and Washington, DC and unifying in Los Angeles.   
  
"We are excited to welcome Maria Menounos to our Special Olympics family,” said Peter Wheeler, Chief of Strategic Properties, Special Olympics. "Maria’s enthusiasm, spirit and tenacity are a perfect fit with our movement and for paving a way for acceptance and inclusion of our athletes throughout the world.”  
  
This summer’s World Games will be Menounos’s second time joining Special Olympics for their flagship event. Menounos participated in the 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Greece where she was a part of the Opening Ceremony and a thought leader with the speaker series held during the nine-day event.   
  
Maria Menounos joins a prestigious list of Global Ambassadors including Her Serene Highness Princess Charlene of Monaco, Nadia Comaneci, Elena Delle Donne, Joe Haden, Scott Hamilton, Padraig Harrington, Yuna Kim, Yang Lan, Damian Lillard, Yao Ming, Ricardo Montaner, Dikembe Mutombo, Hidetoshi Nakata, Apolo Anton Ohno, Michael Phelps, Hannah Teter, Vanessa Williams and Yang Yang.

## Special Olympics Athletes Make Case of Impact and Need for Critical Funding on Capitol Hill

###### **March 19, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.** - Special Olympics  athletes, leaders, and family members from thirty-nine states converged on Capitol Hill yesterday for Special Olympics' 12th annual "Capitol Hill Day."  Throughout the day, Special Olympics athletes held more than two hundred and fifty face-to-face meetings with their Congressional representatives to advocate for continued federal support for critical health and education services provided by Special Olympics that transcend the playing field and transform classrooms, communities, and lives.

Special Olympics self-advocates educated lawmakers and their staffs about the significant consequences that arise from the stigma and stereotypes that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities face and how that impacts their lives in the areas of healthcare, education and more. They were able to effectively convey the high-impact and cost-effectiveness of Special Olympics' programming that addresses these issues, securing support from numerous bi-partisan legislators.

Special Olympics Rhode Island athlete and Capitol Hill Day delegate Maegan Miller said "it was an honor and privilege for me to represent my fellow athletes to our members of Congress: the ask to support our work in areas like health and creating more inclusive schools is critical. People think of us (Special Olympics) as only sports but we're so much more and it's important to me that we get that message across to them. Miller added "Special Olympics has helped me be comfortable in my own skin and accomplish things I never even thought I was capable of doing. I love being an athlete and a part of Special Olympics…I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Special Olympics CEO Janet Froetscher accompanied delegations throughout the day: "This year's Hill Day focused on two key areas, beyond our core mission of sport, in which Special Olympics serves as a powerful catalyst for change: improving the levels of access to and quality of healthcare that people with intellectual disabilities receive, and improving school climates so that children with intellectual disabilities or other differences are not targets of isolation or abuse, and creating an environment in which all children can learn and thrive - socially, emotionally, athletically, and academically. Ours is an urgent mission."

Capitol Hill Day culminated in a "Play Unified, Live Unified" Reception where Special Olympics athletes and ambassadors from across the country, joined by Froetscher, Special Olympics Chairman Dr. Tim Shriver, and Congressional members and staff members, participated in a Special Olympics "Play Unified" event, trying their hand at Unified bocce. The event demonstrated Special Olympics' call to action for everyone to "Play Unified to Live Unified," helping to create communities of inclusion and acceptance for all.

Capitol Hill Day delegates also invited their Congressional leaders to help unify America by participating in the upcoming Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America presented by Bank of America,  a once in a lifetime opportunity for America to unite to build communities of respect and inclusion. Over the course of 46 days (May 26 - July 10) in a hand-to-hand exchange, people throughout the nation will have the opportunity to carry the Special Olympics Flame of Hope across the country and help deliver it to Los Angeles for the [Special Olympics Word Games](http://www.la2015.org/) kicking off on July 25th. The Unified Relay will be three simultaneous routes going through all 50 states and will be led by celebrity and Special Olympics athletes and supported by law enforcement officers. Those interested can learn more and register to be a torchbearer at [www.unifiedrelay.org](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/).

## Tim Shriver to Meet with Maryland Senator to Urge Passage of Legislation to Establish the Ethan Saylor Center for Self-Advocates

###### **March 19, 2015**

**Annapolis, Maryland** - The establishment of the Center was a key recommendation of the Inclusion Commission in its Annual Report.  The Inclusion Commission was formed following the tragic death of Ethan Saylor, a young man who happened to have Down syndrome, who died in the custody of three off-duty Frederick County sheriffs in January, 2013.

S.B 853, sponsored by Senator Ron Young (D-Frederick County), has been referred to the Senate Finance Committee for consideration.  Shriver plans to discuss with Feldman and Miller how Maryland will become a national leader in inclusion by establishing a center that makes people with intellectual and developmental disabilities the centerpiece of educating law enforcement and those in other public sectors about individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.   "The Commission believes that including self-advocates in classrooms and fostering relationships between individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and members of the public sector are the most effective way to teach police officers and others how to communicate with and understand people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," said Shriver.  "Better understanding leads to greater inclusion and safety for law enforcement and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," continued Shriver, who is also a Kennedy Foundation Trustee and Chairman of Special Olympics.

The Saylor Center would recruit, prepare, and coordinate individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to participate as trainers in a variety of trainings across the public sector, with an initial focus on training for law enforcement. Beginning in 2015, all police academies in Maryland must include training on intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DDs).  The Inclusion Commission recommended that self-advocates participate in such training, but the need for qualified trainers far exceeds the current availability.  

## DocuSign Enters into Sponsorship Agreement with Special Olympics

###### **March 11, 2015**

**San Francisco, California --**Today, DocuSign, Inc. (DocuSign®) announced a new sponsorship with Special Olympics to help minimize the hassles of paperwork. As part of the relationship, DocuSign has provided Special Olympics with its Digital Transaction Management (DTM) platform and eSignature solution to empower athletes, guardians, coaches, and doctors to electronically sign required documents like medical releases and participation forms - anytime, anywhere, on any device, securely.  "Reducing barriers to entry is critical for Special Olympics and why we're grateful to DocuSign for providing us with this capability," said Janet Froetscher, CEO of Special Olympics. "We continuously look for ways to transform the way we serve our millions of athletes around the world. With DocuSign, athletes, guardians, coaches, and doctors will be able to complete required health screenings digitally, without the need for paperwork."  
  
DocuSign will be used for local, regional and world Special Olympics Games, including the upcoming 2015 World Summer Games in Los Angeles from July 25 to August 2. DocuSign's DTM platform will minimize the need for Special Olympics to use paper-based documents for athlete health forms. With DocuSign for Office 365, Special Olympics can further streamline business operations and reallocate both cost and time savings to activities that support its mission. "It's a true honor for DocuSign to work with an organization like Special Olympics and help turn dreams into realities for Special Olympics athletes around the world, one eSignature at a time," said Keith Krach, CEO of DocuSign. "DocuSign is all about making it easier to achieve personal and professional success without the hassles of paper slowing you down."  
  
LA 2015, [www.LA2015.org](http://www.la2015.org/), will mark the first World Summer Games held in the U.S. in 16 years and the first time required signatures may be provided digitally. The 2015 Games will feature competitions in aquatics, gymnastics, track and field, basketball, football (soccer) and many other summer sports involving more than 7,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from around the world.

**Engel & Völkers Announces Three-Year Sponsorship of Special Olympics**

###### **March 10, 2015**

**New York, New York** –Engel & Völkers, a European-based premium real estate brand, announced today that it will be the first cause marketing sponsor for the Special Olympics [#PlayUnified campaign](http://www.playunified.org/). The campaign plans to inspire and mobilize youth around the world to connect with people with intellectual disabilities and create more inclusive communities, leading to a more respectful world for everyone. The announcement was made at Engel & Völkers’ annual Exchange event, hosted at the Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa in Las Vegas, Nev.   
  
“Engel &Völkers is proud to be a part of developing the first Unified Generation that will fight inactivity, intolerance and injustice for people with intellectual disabilities,” said CEO of Engel & Völkers North America, Anthony Hitt. “Throughout the duration of our three-year sponsorship of Special Olympics we will be focusing our efforts on the support of the new #PlayUnified Campaign, which strives to build inclusive communities through sports.”   
  
Engel & Völkers chose Special Olympics as the North American charity of choice due to its aligned brand values of passion and competence, the ability to work with Engel & Völkers on national and local levels, and its outstanding brand awareness and reputation. This sponsorship is the first step in the company’s ongoing commitment with its growing North American network of shops and advisors to help create more respectful communities.   
  
“We are extremely pleased to have found such a great supporter for Special Olympics with Engel & Völkers,” said Kelli Seely, Chief Development Officer, Special Olympics. “As a global organization in the real estate business, Engel & Völkers brings both a new channel and untapped audience for us to further generate exposure and momentum around our newly launched #PlayUnified campaign, which encourages people with and without intellectual disabilities to play sports together as teammates.”

## KOICA and Special Olympics Sign an Agreement for Cooperation

###### **March 10, 2015**

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has signed a Cooperation Agreement with Special Olympics at its headquarters in Washington D.C. on March 10, 2015.  
  
The Agreement establishes an initial framework for cooperation between the two parties, providing a basis for joint programs designed to find innovative solutions for reducing poverty, discrimination, health disparities, and support improved health status and standard of living for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization dedicated to the empowerment of individuals with intellectual disabilities; engaging over 4,000,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities in 170 National Programs in seven administrative regions. Special Olympics promotes understanding, acceptance and inclusion between people with and without intellectual disabilities, and seeks to create a model community that celebrates people's diverse gifts.

KOICA will, using its own resources, assist those people with intellectual disability by sending experts and volunteers on the ground and introducing other capacity building programs in collaboration with Special Olympics. For this purpose, KOICA and Special Olympics will also conduct other joint activities based on the Agreement, in the critical development areas of health, education, social inclusion, and more.

"By aligning sports with development goals, we are standing at the forefront of efforts to integrate the most marginalized group into society," said Young-Mok KIM, President of KOICA, referring to the significance of the Agreement.

Mrs. Froetscher, CEO of Special Olympics Inc. (SOI), welcomed the Agreement and appreciated the efforts of KOICA to join the world's movement to help people with intellectual disabilities, particularly, programs and initiatives taken by Special Olympics. Special Olympics expressed the hope that the newly established relationship with KOICA will not only strengthen capabilities of Special Olympics for executing more meaningful programs but also contribute to the efforts of the United Nations to reduce all forms of inequality and disparities throughout the world, particularly in terms of assisting individuals with intellectual disabilities.  "We are honored to be collaborating with the Korea International Cooperation Agency as part of a shared commitment to inclusive development for all," said Special Olympics CEO Janet Froetscher.  "Through this work, we are determined to improve the lives of our athletes throughout the world, using innovative development models to forge sustainable models of inclusion for all.  We are grateful for the commitment shown by the Republic of Korea, and believe this is one of the most noteworthy legacies of the 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games, celebrated in January 2013 in Pyeongchang."

**LA84 Foundation Pledges Support of 2015 Special Olympics World Games**  
  
**March 10, 2015**  
  
**Los Angeles** - The success of the 1984 Olympic Games left behind a legacy for Southern California that has benefitted more than three million children over the last 30 years. The LA84 Foundation, which was endowed with surplus funds from those Games and has distributed more than $220 million to youth sports programs, today announced a $250,000 grant for the 2015 Special Olympics World Games.  LA84's gift will help cover athlete and equipment expenses as well as venue costs for the largest sporting event in the city since those watershed Olympic Games of 1984.  
  
At this morning's announcement at the LA84 Foundation, attended by Rafer Johnson, who lit the caldron to open the 1984 Olympic Games and is the founder of Special Olympics Southern California, Southern California Olympians and Paralympians pledged their support for the 7,000 Special Olympics athletes who will compete in the World Games. This Sunday, World Games athletes will partner with local Olympians and Paralympians for a special Unified Relay at the ASICS LA Marathon. Each pair of runners will complete at least a 2-mile leg of the 26.2-mile course from Dodger Stadium to the Santa Monica Pier.

"The LA84 Foundation is pleased to partner with Southern California Olympians and Paralympians in support of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games" said Anita L. DeFrantz, President of the LA84 Foundation and Executive Board Member of the International Olympic Committee.  "As the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games, we recognize the tremendous impact that the Special Olympics World Games will have in bringing together the residents of Los Angeles to celebrate and applaud the efforts of the Special Olympics athletes.  Olympians and Paralympians have reached the highest pinnacle in sports.  They will be proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with Special Olympics athletes who have demonstrated the same level of commitment to success in the field of play.  We invite everyone to come out and join us in welcoming these athletes to Los Angeles and share in their joy as they give it their best."

"The support of LA84 and local Olympians and Paralympians will go a long way to help make our event a success," said Patrick McClenahan, President and CEO of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, who also sits on the Board of Directors of the LA84 Foundation. "Thanks to this grant, many of the world's most inspirational competitors will carry forth the positive legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games and motivate a whole new generation with their courage, determination and joy."

**2015 Special Olympics World Games Announce Host Town Delegations**  
  
**March 05, 2015**  
  
Los Angeles, California  - Today residents and leaders from more than 100 communities in Southern California learned if they would be saying Bonjour!, ¡Hola!, 您好!, Привет! or Hello! beginning July 21 when they host 7,000 athletes and 3,000 coaches in the days prior to the start of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles. Delegates from as many as 170 Special Olympics Programs from around the world will spend three days and nights in communities stretching from San Luis Obispo to San Diego as part of the Host Town program - enjoying a warm welcome to the U.S. before moving into the Athlete Villages at USC and UCLA on July 24. Additional communities and delegations will be announced in the coming weeks, including the Host Town for Special Olympics Team USA.

Today's Host Town pairing announcement follows the successful Head of Delegation Conference that opened with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti greeting the attendees with "welcome to your second home." The four-day conference held January 21-25, 2015, brought together key members of national and international Special Olympics Programs to learn about World Games venues, operations and services. The Opening Ceremony of the World Games, now less than five months away, will be held at the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on July 25 and televised to a worldwide audience by ESPN.

The Host Town program has been an important element of Special Olympics World Games since 1995. The experience has left a lasting impression on the local communities in Ireland, Japan, China, Greece, South Korea and the United States, all of which have previously organized Host Town programs as part of the Special Olympics World Games. Communities are evaluated on the availability of lodging accommodations, sports practice facilities and recreation/entertainment offerings for the athletes, among other criteria. Each Host Town committee is also responsible for planning activities for the athletes to introduce them to the community and help spread the word about the World Games.

"The Host Town program gives each community an opportunity to showcase to the world what makes them special, but more importantly to provide citizens with a better understanding of intellectual disabilities that will lead to acceptance and inclusion for all," said Patrick McClenahan, President and CEO of LA2015. "Long after the World Games are over, the memories of those three days spent at Host Town will leave a lasting legacy for Special Olympics Southern California and everyone who was touched by our athletes. We are thankful to all participating Host Towns and their tireless volunteers for opening their doors - and their hearts - to our athletes and coaches."

To date, the following communities are confirmed to host these delegations:

* Alhambra: Germany (shared with Monterey Park and Lincoln Heights)
* Anaheim: Canada (shared with Orange), Senegal
* Arcadia: Kyrgyz Republic, Trinidad & Tobago
* Azusa: South Africa (shared with Duarte and Glendora)
* Bakersfield: Jordan, Kenya
* Beverly Hills: Gibraltar, Monaco
* Big Bear Lake: Chile, Luxembourg, Montenegro
* Burbank: Botswana, Zimbabwe
* Calabasas: Great Britain
* Camarillo: New Zealand, Saudi Arabia
* Carson: Dominica, Palestine, Turkmenistan
* Cerritos: Slovenia, Turkey, Uruguay (shared with Lakewood)
* Chatsworth: Serbia
* Chino Valley (Chino and Chino Hills): Laos, Poland
* Claremont: Bolivia, Curaçao, Georgia Republic, Latvia
* Corona: Iran, Slovakia
* Costa Mesa: Aruba, Bahamas, Malawi
* Downey: Ireland
* Downtown Los Angeles: Algeria, Moldova, Colombia
* Duarte: South Africa (shared with Azusa and Glendora)
* El Segundo: Barbados, Uzbekistan, FYR Macedonia
* Fountain Valley: Netherlands
* Fullerton: Lebanon, Rwanda, Tunisia, Ukraine
* Glendale: Armenia, Bonaire, Dominican Republic
* Glendora: South Africa (shared with Azusa and Duarte)
* Goleta: Bhutan, Panama, Qatar
* Hacienda Heights: Belarus, Bosnia, Tanzania, Timor-Leste
* Hawthorne: Estonia, Nigeria
* Hermosa Beach: Belgium, Belize
* Huntington Beach: Australia
* Inglewood: Jamaica
* Irvine: Korea
* La Habra: Lithuania, Myanmar, Norway
* La Jolla: Bharat (India)
* La Mirada: Russia
* La Verne: Pakistan, U.S. Virgin Islands
* Laguna Hills: Cayman Islands, Syria (shared with Lake Forest)
* Lake Forest: Cayman Islands, Syria (shared with Laguna Hills)
* Lakewood: Slovenia, Turkey, Uruguay (shared with Cerritos)
* Lincoln Heights: Germany (shared with Alhambra and Monterey Park)
* Long Beach: China
* Manhattan Beach: Hungary, Nepal
* Mission Viejo: Indonesia, Spain
* Monterey Park: Germany (sharing with Alhambra and Lincoln Heights)
* Mountain Communities of Lake Arrowhead: Switzerland
* Newport Beach: Mexico, Fiji
* Northridge: Azerbaijan, Malta, Vietnam
* Ontario: Iceland, Iraq, Seychelles
* Orange: Canada (shared with Anaheim)
* Oxnard: Afghanistan, American Samoa, Kosovo, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga
* Palm Springs: Bahrain, Portugal
* Palmdale: Cyprus, St. Lucia
* Pasadena: Namibia, Singapore
* Pomona: Isle of Man, Libya
* Poway: Ecuador, Togo
* Rancho Cucamonga: Côte d'Ivoire
* Rancho Santa Fe: Brunei, Bulgaria, Uganda
* Redlands: Austria, Liechtenstein
* Redondo Beach: Benin, Haiti, Suriname
* Reseda: Hellas (Greece) (shared with Tarzana and Woodland Hills)
* Riverside: Sweden
* San Diego Downtown: Albania, Burkina Faso, Finland, Mali
* San Diego East County (El Cajon): Egypt, Hong Kong
* San Diego Golden Triangle (La Jolla and University City): Costa Rica
* San Diego North County (Del Mar, Encinitas and Solana Beach): Ghana, Swaziland, Thailand
* San Diego South County (Chula Vista, Coronado and National City): Argentina, Puerto Rico
* San Luis Obispo County (Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Grover Beach, Morro Bay, Pismo Beach and San Luis Obispo): Bangladesh, Cambodia
* San Pedro: Croatia, Kazakhstan
* Santa Barbara: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Kitts & Nevis
* Santa Clarita: El Salvador, Faroe Islands, Malaysia, Philippines
* Santa Maria: France, Mauritius, Republic of Congo
* Santa Monica: Brazil, Romania
* Santa Monica Mountains: Israel
* Simi Valley: Peru, Serendib (Sri Lanka), Zambia
* Solvang: Denmark
* South Pasadena: Morocco, Paraguay
* Studio City: Cuba, Czech Republic
* Tarzana: Hellas (Greece) (shared with Reseda and Woodland Hills)
* Thousand Oaks: Mongolia, San Marino, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Tajikistan
* West Covina: Nippon (Japan)
* West Los Angeles: Italy
* Whittier: Macau
* Winnetka: Venezuela
* Woodland Hills: Hellas (Greece) (shared with Reseda and Tarzana)

## Special Olympics and Best Buddies Celebrate 7th Annual Spread the Word to End the Word® Day on March 4th

###### **March 04, 2015**

**Washington, D.C. -** Special Olympics, Best Buddies, and supporters from around the world will unite today on the seventh annual Spread the Word to End the Word® Day to continue building awareness for society to stop and think about its use of the R-word and rally people around the world to pledge respect toward*all* individuals, making the world a more accepting and inclusive place for all people, especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Through engagement with schools, organizations and communities, the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign urges young people around the world to take a stand in their own communities and help change the conversation by eliminating the use of the R-word and replacing it with 'respect.'  The campaign   highlights the harmful effects the word "retard(ed)" has on the millions of people with IDD, their families and friends.  Use of the R-word, "retard" or "retarded," is hurtful and painful and, whether intended or not, is a form of bullying.  Eliminating the use of this word is a step toward respect for all.

The Spread the Word to End the Word grassroots campaign was created in February 2009 by youth who participated in the Special Olympics Global Youth Activation Summit, held in conjunction with the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Idaho. Led by Soeren Palumbo and Timbo Shriver (son of Special Olympics Chairman Timothy Shriver), the campaign evolved out of a united passion to promote the positive contributions people with IDD make in communities around the world. It was combined with a simple call to action to take the pledge and inspired thousands of K-12 schools and universities across the country to hold rallies enlisting young people to take the pledge. To date, over 500,000 people have taken the pledge online to end the use of the R-word and millions more have signed banners and petitions throughout the world.  This year, Spread the Word to End the Word supporters including the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation and WWE have activated their communities to engage around the day with pledge and employee engagement events.

"Today, we are hopeful that 30,000 more people around the country will join us and take the pledge to show #Respect for *all* individuals," said Soeren Palumbo, co-founder of the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign. "We have accomplished so much over the last seven years and want to continue to build a future of respect for people with IDD but need to encourage everyone around the country to not only pledge to end their use of the R-word, but to act in a way that creates a more inclusive world. If you are a student and see someone with IDD sitting alone at lunch, join him or her.  If you are in the workplace and someone with IDD works for your organization and you have never spoken to him or her, reach out and start a conversation.  If you are on the playing field, invite someone with IDD to kick a ball around with you.  Show respects; but more than that, strive to be inclusive."

What started as one single action of taking the pledge has evolved into communities across the world challenging others to talk, think and write with respect.   A letter-writing campaign and social media blitz led by the Special Olympics Youth Activation Summit drew more attention to the campaign - as well as an apology - on American television host and political commentator Bill O'Reilly's show after the R-word was used. More recently, Special Olympics athlete John Franklin Stephens led the charge [via a blog post](https://specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com/2012/10/23/an-open-letter-to-ann-coulter/) that went viral when pundit Ann Coulter lashed out with the word.  Stephens received support from over 3 million people through social media in just a matter of days.  Supporters from across the country were urging Stephens to 'run for President!' The F/X network now includes the R-word as one of three words that are not allowed to be broadcast.  MTV has also embraced the campaign by bleeping out the R-word just like any other curse word or slur in shows like "The Real World" and "Teen Mom."   In 2010, a Maryland woman with an intellectual disability was the inspiration for Rosa's Law.  The bill, championed by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) and Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyom.), garnered overwhelming support in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Starting that year, federal agencies dropped the terms "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" in federal health, education and labor laws and replaced them with "intellectual disability" -- and as of this year, 48, states have passed similar legislation.

Through these and other important milestones, the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign has continued to advocate on behalf of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities and to work to make our society more inclusive. Special Olympics Project UNIFY®, in large part supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Education, is an education-based project that uses sports and education programs to activate young people to develop school communities where all youth are agents of change - fostering respect, dignity and advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.  Special Olympics Project UNIFY® is built upon the premise that in order to have the greatest impact the change needs to start with young people. Project UNIFY is already in over 3,100 schools in 45 states across the country and many of those schools support Spread the Word to End the Word efforts through running pledge stations or holding student rallies to promote inclusion. Best Buddies International youth programs promote one-to-one friendship opportunities and leadership development in schools around the world, raising awareness and acceptance for people with IDD in their communities. With over 1,900 middle school, high school, and college chapters worldwide, the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign has become an integral part of the Best Buddies mission and showcases Best Buddies' commitment to creating inclusive opportunities for people with IDD on a global level.

"Up to three percent of the world's population has an intellectual disability - that's almost 200 million people around the world - making it one of the largest disability populations on earth," said Timbo Shriver, co-founder of the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign.  "This year we celebrate Spread the Word to End the Word Day knowing that 48 states across our country have passed legislation to remove the 'R-word' from their language, a significant step in building a future of respect and inclusion for *all* people.  But we still have work to do at home and abroad - most countries have an 'R-word' in their language too.    We need to do more and today; we ask that you do your part and more by visiting [r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org/) and taking the pledge."

**Get Involved!**

Engage with us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/EndtheWord](http://www.facebook.com/EndtheWord) or Twitter at [twitter.com/EndtheWord](http://twitter.com/EndtheWord), so that we can reach our goal of gaining 30,000 tweets/re-tweets of the pledge in this year alone! Tweet this pledge today:  
  
*I pledge #Respect thru my words and actions. Will you? Pledge now to create communities of inclusion for people with ID r-word.org*  
  
We also want to use this year's Spread the Word to End the Word awareness day as an opportunity to encourage more people to not only take the pledge, but to become part of our Movement.  After taking the pledge, you may ask, now what?  Share one of the below tweets with your followers:  
  
*After you pledge #Respect at r-word.org, carry the torch for respect in our #UnifiedRelay.  Learn more :*[unifiedrelay.org](http://www.unifiedrelay.org/" \o "unifiedrelay.org" \t "_blank)

**WWE Superstars for Hope to Benefit Special Olympics**

**February 27, 2015**

WWE  announced the launch of Superstars for Hope, a fundraising campaign, to benefit Special Olympics and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford in honor of Connor’s Cure. The announcement was made by WWE Chief Brand Officer Stephanie McMahon, WWE Hall of Famer Hulk Hogan and WWE Superstar John Cena.

WWE announced the launch of Superstars for Hope, a fundraising campaign on Indiegogo, the world’s largest crowdfunding platform, to benefit Special Olympics and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital

Stanford in honor of Connor’s Cure. The announcement was made exclusively on Twitter by WWE Chief Brand Officer Stephanie McMahon, WWE Hall of Famer Hulk Hogan and WWE Superstar John Cena. To kick off Superstars for Hope, WWE and the San Francisco 49ers Foundation have each donated $25,000, the first in a series of community outreach initiatives in celebration of WrestleMania 31 at Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara on Sunday, March 29.  
  
Beginning February 26, supporters can donate at[SuperstarsforHope.com](http://www.superstarsforhope.com/) and receive unique WWE merchandise, autographs, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences from WWE Superstars, Divas and Legends. Each week, WWE will add new exclusive experiences to the campaign, including:  
  
- A tour of WWE’s state-of-the-art Performance Center in Orlando, Florida  
- Backstage access to Monday Night Raw or SmackDown  
- VIP package to WWE pay-per-view events  
- Lunch with WWE Superstar Triple H at the WWE Performance Center  
- WWE World Heavyweight Championship title signed by WWE Chairman & CEO Vince McMahon, Stephanie McMahon and Triple H  
- An ultimate WrestleMania 32 package  
- Lunch with the cast of the hit E! reality show Total Divas  
  
“WWE’s support of Special Olympics gives us a unique platform from which to reach, educate and welcome countless new fans and athletes to our movement,” said Janet Froetscher, CEO, Special Olympics. “The important work we do around the world to create communities of acceptance and respect for all will only be successful when the world heeds our call to Play Unified in order to Live Unified."  
  
“Every day at Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford, our doctors, staff, and researchers strive to ensure the best possible care for children with cancer,” said Christopher G. Dawes, president and CEO of Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford. “WWE has been a strong advocate of pediatric cancer research and we're pleased to support the important mission of Connor’s Cure.”  
  
"WWE is dedicated to using the power of our brand to give back to the community in as many ways as we can," said Stephanie McMahon, WWE Chief Brand Officer. "I am proud that this year’s Superstars for Hope campaign will support two worthwhile causes, Special Olympics celebrating acceptance and inclusion, and Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford in honor of Connor’s Cure in an effort to find a cure for pediatric cancer.”  
  
“The 49ers Foundation is proud to be partnering with WWE to further our commitment to making an impact on and off the field,” said John York, Chairman/Co-Owner of the San Francisco 49ers. “Special Olympics and Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford provide much needed resources for superstars in our community – athletes with intellectual disabilities and children fighting life-threatening and life-limiting illness. It is an honor to join with WWE to support them through the Superstars for Hope campaign.”  
  
In support of Superstars for Hope, celebrities and athletes are serving as official social media ambassadors to help raise funds and awareness. Ambassadors include San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, journalist Joan Lunden, journalist and Yahoo! global news anchor Katie Couric, multi-platinum recording artist and actress Jordin Sparks and actor Kellan Lutz.

Fans can click here now through Tuesday, March 31 to participate and use the hashtag #STARS4HOPE when donating.

**12 New International Global Messengers Selected**

**February 25, 2015**

**Washington, D.C.** - Twelve Special Olympics athletes have been selected to serve as a Sargent Shriver International Global Messenger (IGM) for the next four years. Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers are Special Olympics athletes appointed as spokespersons to spread the message and vision of the movement, representing not only the organization as a whole, but their individual countries as well. As leaders and message-bearers of the movement, International Global Messengers communicate the powerful declarations of hope, acceptance, dignity and courage of Special Olympics athletes around the world. Ten countries are represented in this year's class: Austria, Botswana, Egypt, Indonesia, Korea, Macau, the Netherlands, Panama, Thailand, and the United States. From April 19 - April 26, the new class of International Global Messengers will meet for the first time at Special Olympics headquarters in Washington, D.C., for an in-depth training sponsored by Bank of America to gain the critical skills necessary to serve as global athlete leaders and spokespersons.

"Our Special Olympics athletes are the leaders of our movement, playing important and pivotal roles throughout Special Olympics, including Board Directors, spokespersons, coaches, officials and more," shared Janet Froetscher, CEO, Special Olympics. "I am thrilled to welcome this new class of International Global Messengers and look forward to hosting them at our headquarters in April as they prepare for this important role for our movement."

Named for the late Sargent Shriver, Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver's husband, the Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers program is part of the Special Olympics Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPs), which offers leadership, public speaking, and advocacy training to athletes interested in representing the organization. IGMs are an integral part of the Special Olympics organization. The IGM role is an extremely competitive and sought-after role within the organization - this year's candidates included 73 applicants from 22 states and 39 countries around the world. They were selected based on their demonstrated interest participating as ambassadors for Special Olympics beyond sports and competition, their overall leadership skills and personal story representing Special Olympics. They will attend events in their respective regions and throughout the world, making speeches, presenting awards, and supporting the development of the athlete leadership strategy. This new class of IGMs will serve a vital role in the upcoming 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles from July 25 - Aug. 2, participating in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, attending and giving speeches at various events, cheering on their fellow athletes, and interacting with many of the honored guests in attendance.

The first class of Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers was inducted in 1998 to mark the 30th anniversary of Special Olympics. Every four years, 12 athletes are selected to train through the Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers program and serve as primary spokespeople on behalf of Special Olympics, appearing in national and international media outlets, carrying forth the themes that are most important to athletes in Special Olympics Programs around the world. There have been a total of 84 International Global Messengers selected to date. Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers are nominated by Special Olympics regional staff and chosen by a leadership committee at Special Olympics headquarters, who review all applicants and determine final selections based on athletes' leadership skills and interest in serving as spokespeople for the organization.

International Global Messengers training sponsor Bank of America is also presenting sponsor of the Special Olympics Unified Relay Across America, a 46-day torch run that will visit all 50 states and bring the Flame of Hope from Athens, Greece to the 2015 World Games in Los Angeles. Bank of America is also an official partner of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles.  
  
**Special Olympics Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers for 2014 - 2018 Term**

Brightfield Shadi, Botswana

Selina Ao Ieong, Macau

Yoona Kim, Korea

Omar Mohamed El Shenawy, Egypt

Lize Weerdenburg, the Netherlands

David Egan, Virginia, USA

Johanna Pramstaller, Austria

Pam Langille, New Hampshire, USA

Nitzeida Galvez Orozco, Panama

Jason Gieschen, Nebraska, USA

Stephanie Handojo, Indonesia

Chanchai Kemkaew, Thailand