

Special Olympics Illinois Milestones

(Includes International Games)

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- 1950s Dr. William Freeberg of Southern Illinois University creates extensive camping program for people with mental retardation* at Little Grassy Lake in Carbondale.
- early 1960s The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, spearheaded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, asks Dr. Freeberg to help develop a national program in recreation and physical fitness for people with mental retardation. Mrs. Shriver runs a summer camp for children with mental retardation at her home in Maryland.
- 1965 The Chicago Park District sends 10 recreation teachers, including Anne McGlone (Burke), to a workshop with Dr. Freeberg and begins offering recreation programs for children with mental retardation with a grant from the Kennedy Foundation.
- 1968 The City of Chicago, Chicago Park District and Kennedy Foundation embrace the idea for a major sports event modeled after the Olympics that will demonstrate the abilities of the children in the program. A call goes out to schools and institutions in the United States and Canada for "retarded children to come to Chicago for the thrill of a lifetime ... the glamour and pageantry of a genuine national Olympics."
- July 20, 1968 Anne Burke organizes the first Special Olympics competition held at Soldier Field, Chicago with 1,000 athletes from 26 states and Canada. Mrs. Shriver announces the establishment of Special Olympics as an official organization.
- 1970 The second international Special Olympics Summer Games returns to Soldier Field, Chicago with 2,000 athletes from 50 states, Canada, France and Puerto Rico.
- 1972 Illinois Special Olympics has the state divided into three Area programs (north, south & central). The state headquarters continues to be at the Chicago Park District in Chicago. The third international Special Olympics Summer Games are held in Los Angeles.

*eventually, the terminology used by Special Olympics changes from mental retardation to intellectual disabilities

- 1975 Area programs continue to be added in Illinois. Bowling, basketball, gymnastics, floor hockey, and alpine skiing have been added to the original sports of athletics (track & field) and aquatics as sports offered in Illinois.
- 1977 Illinois Special Olympics headquarters moves from the Chicago Park District to Illinois State University in Normal, housed at University High School. ISU will be the site of major State competitions, including Summer Games and Basketball. Speed skating, volleyball, soccer, softball and cross-country skiing are now included. The first international Winter Games are held in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.
- 1978 Figure skating is added as a sport in Illinois.
- 1979 The fifth international Special Olympics Summer Games are held in Brockport, N.Y.
- 1980 The first Illinois Special Olympics State Winter Games are held at Chestnut Mountain in Galena, Illinois. The next year (1981) the second international Special Olympics Winter Games are held in Stowe, Vermont.
- 1983 The sixth international Special Olympics Summer Games are held at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.
- 1985 The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Illinois (inspired by Kansas) is established in Illinois. The third international Special Olympics Winter Games are held in Park City, Utah.
- 1986 Tennis and powerlifting are added in Illinois. The 1987 International Special Olympics Summer Games are held at University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana.
- 1989 Illinois Special Olympics moves into its own headquarters building at 605 E. Willow Street in Normal.
- 1990 Equestrian is added as a sport in Illinois.
- 1993 Special Olympics celebrates 25 years of athletic achievement.
- 1995 The 1995 Special Olympics World Summer Games are held at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. A Yale University Study finds that Special Olympics athletes gain social skills enabling them to do better at home, at work and in the community than peers who are not in Special Olympics.
- Project 2000 is a new initiative undertaken in Illinois to increase the number of Chicago Public School children involved in Special Olympics training and competition.

- 1997 The first Athlete Global Messengers are trained in Illinois to speak on behalf of the program and to share their inspirational stories with the community – this is the beginning of the Athlete Leadership Program. Golf and bocce have been added, bringing the number of sports offered in Illinois to 18. The Healthy Athletes initiative becomes official at Special Olympics, Inc. and in Illinois, offering healthcare services through Special Smiles and Opening Eyes at selected events. The 1997 World Winter Games are held in Toronto/Collingwood, Ontario.
- 1998 Special Olympics, Inc. celebrates 30 Years of Heroes at a ceremony at the Chicago Cultural Center with 12 Athlete Global Messengers from around the world, including Sophia Wesolowsky from Chicago. Mohammad Ali is a special guest. Illinois has its first Athlete Input Council, part of the Athlete Leadership Program.
- 1999 Special Olympics Illinois has grown to serve nearly 18,000 athletes, with the state divided into 17 Local Area programs, each with an Area Director. The first MedFest is held at United Center in Chicago to enable athletes to have the required physicals necessary for participation – free of charge – compliments of Advocate Health Centers and United Center. This becomes a model for other MedFests around the world.
- 2000 The Special Olympics Flame of Hope is taken from a ceremony at Soldier Field to O’Hare Field where there is a send-off ceremony with Special Olympics Chairman Sargent Shriver and Illinois athletes. The Flame travels to Beijing, China, for the Special Olympics China Millenium March with torchbearer Arnold Schwarzenegger. China declares it will increase the number of Special Olympics athletes from 50,000 to 500,000 by 2005. Special Olympics Illinois adds its first athlete to the Board of Directors as part of the Athlete Leadership Program.
- 2001 Special Olympics Illinois adds a second athlete to the Board of Directors, serving a 2-year term. Ground was broken for the expansion of the headquarters building including a new training center.
- 2002 On June 20, the Special Olympics Illinois headquarters expansion and the new volunteer training center are dedicated and ground is broken for the Special Olympics Illinois Tribute Park (adjacent to headquarters) to honor athletes, families, volunteers and donors. Snowshoeing along with Unified bocce, Unified tennis and Unified golf are added as official sports in Illinois.

- 2003 The program has grown to serve nearly 20,000 athletes in Illinois. Twenty-three athletes from Illinois compete in the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Dublin, Ireland, held from June 21-29 – the first time the World Summer Games take place outside the United States. Anne Burke and seven athletes from Chicago who had competed in the first Games at Soldier Field are invited to represent Chicago at the World Games in Ireland.
- 2005 The Special Olympics Illinois Tribute Park – the first of its kind in the world – is dedicated adjacent to the state headquarters at 605 E. Willow St., Normal. It honors athletes, families, volunteers and donors with dedicated walls, and features an athlete statue, water wall, team walk and athlete bricks. It helps establish an endowment to ensure the program for the future.
- The 2005 World Winter Games are held in Nagano, Japan. Tony Hill of Belleville, Illinois is one of 12 international Global Messengers serving a 2-year term and is involved in World Games activities.
- 2006 The Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run reaches the \$2 million mark for the year. The first USA National Games are held in Ames, Iowa, at Iowa State University. The Law Enforcement Torch Run members lights the Flame of Hope outside Soldier Field and carry it to the Opening Ceremony in Ames. Suzanne Thompson, mother of an Illinois athlete, gives an inspiring speech at the Closing Ceremony.
- 2007 The family statue called “The First Ribbon,” underwritten by the Illinois Knights of Columbus, is dedicated in the family plaza of the Special Olympics Illinois Tribute Park. The Special Olympics Young Athletes Program for ages 2-7 is officially launched in Illinois. This new initiative prepares children to enter the formal Special Olympics program at age 8. In October, athletes from Illinois are among those participating as part of Team USA in the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China – the first time a World Summer Games is held in Asia. Chicago athlete John Fajdich serves as a tennis official at World Games, as part of the Athlete Leadership Program.
- 2008 All 17 Special Olympics Illinois local Area programs celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Special Olympics during the year. Special Children’s Charities and the Chicago Park District host a celebration for city of Chicago athletes and friends at Soldier Field with Mayor Richard M. Daley. The inaugural Special Olympics Illinois *Inspire Greatness Gala* is held at the Hilton Chicago on July 19. Tim Shriver, Chairman of Special Olympics Inc., attends both events. Elmer Mestrovic of Burnside School in Chicago is named Special Olympics North America Coach of the Year. By the end of the year, there are now more than 20,000 athletes participating in Special Olympics in Illinois including more than 2,000 children in the Special Olympics Illinois Young Athletes Program.

- 2009 Illinois athletes participate in the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, which also hosts a Youth Activation Summit that spurs the “Spread the Word to End the Word” (retard) effort embraced by Special Olympics programs, including Illinois. Seven additional MedFest events around Illinois, added to the highly successful Chicago MedFest held annually at United Center, provide a gateway for participation in Special Olympics through the free sports physicals. Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver passes away on Aug. 11, 2009.
- 2010 More than 10,000 children have been involved in the Special Olympics Illinois Young Athletes Program since its inception in 2007. The northern region of Illinois is restructured to improve the quality of local competition and to accommodate future athlete growth. Athletes from Illinois compete in the second Special Olympics USA National Games, held in Lincoln, Neb.
- 2011 Gala Co-Chairs Patricia Hemingway Hall, CEO of Health Care Services Corporation, and Greg Wasson, CEO of Walgreen’s, lead the effort to raise nearly \$750,000 for Special Olympics Illinois at the 4th Annual Inspire Greatness Gala. Six counties in the central and southern regions are moved to new Areas to improve the quality of competition and expected growth. Eight athletes from Illinois compete in the 2011 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Athens, Greece.
- R. Sargent Shriver, former Chairman of Special Olympics Inc., passes away on Jan. 18, 2011, and Special Olympics Illinois president/CEO Doug Snyder passes away on Aug. 11, 2011, shortly before his planned retirement date of Aug. 31. Dave Breen is named President and CEO of Special Olympics Illinois. The Law Enforcement Torch Run ends the year as the No. 2 program for 2011 in the world, raising nearly \$3 million for Special Olympics Illinois.
- 2012 Students at 33 schools sign up to lead Project UNIFY activities, creating safe and welcoming environments for all youth with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Illinois’ Facebook fans help the organization win a new Toyota van for the Young Athletes Program. Working with our medical partners, Special Olympics helps provide nearly 2,000 free sports physicals at eight “MedFest” events around the state. In addition, 454 athletes visit Healthy Athletes at Summer Games, receiving free vision screenings, audiology screenings and a physical therapy analysis.
- 2013 All 18 Special Olympics Illinois local Area programs celebrate the 45th anniversary of Special Olympics throughout the year and the 15th consecutive year of growth, ending the year with 21,482 traditional athletes and 18,549 Young Athletes and Peer Partners. The Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run raises nearly \$3.3 million. The 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games are held in PyeongChang, Republic of Korea, and five Illinois athletes are members of Team USA delegation.

2014 Special Olympics Illinois introduces two new state competitions – Skating Championships (speed and figure skating) and State Tennis Tournament – with the goal of growing those sports. The 2014 Special Olympics USA Games are held in Princeton, N.J., with 52 athletes, six Unified Partners and 17 coaches representing Team Illinois. The year ends at \$10.5 million in revenue, with the assistance of the Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run which raises \$3.8 million.

2015 Special Olympics Illinois celebrates its 17th consecutive year of growth, serving 22,003 traditional athletes and 20,473 Young Athletes and Peer Partners. The Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run surpasses another milestone by raising \$4.1 million in a single year. There are 295 competitions held throughout the state; 45,000 people volunteer throughout the year; 3,669 participants are given free health screenings through Healthy Athletes, and 125 schools across the state adopt Project UNIFY.

Special Olympics Illinois sends 24 athletes, 8 coaches and 6 officials to the 2015 World Summer Games in Los Angeles, as part of the Special Olympics USA team. SOILL athlete/Global Messenger Daniel Smrokowski or “Podman Dan” works as a journalist during the Games, while fellow athlete/Global Messenger Breanna Bogucki performs “Reach Up” with O.A.R. lead singer Marc Roberge and Cody Simpson at the Opening Ceremony.

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