

Caledon Special Olympics welcoming new athletes and volunteers]

By Zachary Roman

There's an organization in Caledon that's dedicated to enriching the lives of those with intellectual disabilities through sport: Caledon Special Olympics.

A division of Special Olympics Ontario, which in turn is part of Special Olympics Canada, Caledon Special Olympics provides a variety of great sports programs and initiatives to individuals in our community.

The group was recently at Caledon's 2023 Winterfest event to share information about what they do with the community ? and Special Olympics athletes were participating in the free skating and swimming offered that day.

Caledon gained its own chapter of Special Olympics not too long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Now that the world is opening back up, Caledon Special Olympics wants to let the local community know sports programs are being held every week and that new athletes are welcome to join. With more athletes will also come a need for more volunteers, and Caledon Special Olympics also wants to let the community know there's room for more volunteers too.

Some sports offered by Caledon Special Olympics include Wednesday bocce, Thursday basketball, and Sunday swimming. There's also golf and soccer with dates to be announced, and track and field that takes place in the summer.

For full information on programs and how to register, those interested can visit caledon.specialolympicsontario.ca. This website also contains information on how to become a volunteer with Caledon Special Olympics.

Bocce is a great introduction to Special Olympics for new athletes and can be played by those of all abilities. Caledon Special Olympics athlete representative Jason Scorcia describes bocce as a cross between bowling and curling. It's played at the new Di Gregorio Bocce Centre at 125 Pembroke Street in Bolton, and athletes say the new centre is great for the sport.

Caledon Special Olympics is a non-profit and survives on fundraising in order to keep costs minimal for athletes. Most sports programs cost just \$35 for registration, with the exception of swimming as the organization has to cover the cost of the pool.

Athletes who participate in Caledon Special Olympics have the opportunity to compete in tournaments if they desire more competition and adventure, and athletes from Caledon have competed at the Provincial and National levels. Athletes have traveled to places like Vancouver and Nova Scotia to compete in sports like track and field.

Athletes are able to take sports as casually or as seriously as they want when they participate in Caledon Special Olympics.

?The benefit as a parent is the friendships that I've made and the knowledge that I've acquired through having my son participate in Special Olympics,? said one parent at Winterfest. ?My son, 100 per cent his independence has improved, his ability to communicate, his connection to other people has improved and all of that I wouldn't have had without Special Olympics ? and that's something I think that a lot of parents have found. It's provided me with my own community as well as my son's own community.?