

Local motionball event supports Special Olympics athletes

By Rob Paul

As the Special Olympics grow, athletes across Canada spend years training to represent their country and to compete with the elite of the elite in one of the most prestigious athletic competitions in the world.

With the Summer Special Olympics set for 2023 in Berlin, Germany, young Canadians with intellectual and physical disabilities will have the opportunity to see what they too can accomplish one day.

To help empower young Canadians to become community leaders, motionball, a national non-profit, raises funds and awareness for Special Olympics through integrated social and sporting events.

They believe that the next generation of Canadians, today's students and young professionals, are the future of the Special Olympics movement ? with the power to make meaningful difference for generations to come.

Not only does motionball set out to raise awareness and funds for Special Olympics, but it also looks to provide more people with the tools to pursue their passions and make a difference in their own communities.

To help introduce the next generation of donors, volunteers and sponsors to the Special Olympics movement through integrated social and sporting events, motionball hosts over 50 annual events in 17 Canadian cities and 34 university campuses. Through the events and in support of the movement, motionball has donated over \$14,000,000 net since its inception in 2002.

Councillor Annette Groves, Caledon resident and President of Jason's Quest Jason Scordia, and the Bolton Village Resident Association have partnered with motionball to bring an event to Caledon this September to raise awareness for the #NoGoodWay to use the R-word campaign.

?Having Jason is so important because he grew up here in the community and he participates in so many things,? said Groves. ?He's always out and helping to organize anything we do in the community. It's so important to have him because he's a face of our community; people know Jason and having him will help bring more people out to support because he works so hard in this community. And also having the Bolton Village Resident Association behind this as well is a huge help for volunteering and informing the community on the event.

?motionball runs these events to raise awareness and funding for the Special Olympics but we've never done one in Caledon. This will be the first one here and Jason competed and won the gold medal in golf for us and it's important to us that we bring an event to the Town. This is something that's been around for over 20 years and it's really to get athletes participating in sports while fundraising. Special Olympics Canada reached out to me, and we connected and we were looking to do it in June, but we had to move it to September.?

To help with the motionball event, Groves and the organizing team are looking for volunteers to not just set up and run the event, but to make connections and build a community feel with everyone involved.

?I'm working with the Bolton Village Resident Association to coordinate it and organize it, we're going to need volunteers and we have opportunities for other groups to help out,? Groves said. ?The number one goal is to raise awareness, there's the #NoGoodWay that raises awareness to remove the R-word from people's vocabulary. There's no good way of saying that word and we want to raise awareness around that and for the Special Olympics in general. It's also an opportunity for everyone to come together and have some fun while playing the sports we put together. Another big part to it is the fundraising because they need the funds to help support these athletes perform and compete in their events.?

The overall event will focus on different sports and fun the kids involved while having Special Olympics athletes captain the teams and help teach them the sports.

“Young athletes are welcome to participate and it's with any sport that involves a ball—basketball, golf, soccer, and even bocce ball,” Groves said. “We're really excited about bocce ball too because we do have the new bocce ball indoor building, whereas before athletes would have to go to Vaughan to practice. Each team will also have a Special Olympic athlete on it, we're looking to put together about 10 teams with eight to 10 individuals.”

The reason Groves is so passionate about this event is because she has long been involved with different groups in Caledon that help support individuals with intellectual and physical challenges in an effort to help make them feel they're part of the community.

“For me, this is an easy event to support because I do a lot of work with these individuals who have challenges,” she said. “Whether it be with Meaghan's Room where we provide music for these individuals or with the CAFFI House (Caledon Area Families for Including Housing) where I worked with our committee, orchestrated and organized by Patricia Franks, to build the CAFFI House for these individuals because of course parents get concerned about their children as they get older and what will happen to their children with special needs. That makes doing events and initiatives like this really easy for me to get behind because when you're working with these individuals, it is so very rewarding. They're just great people and the goal here for myself is all about inclusion. I don't want these individuals with special needs or challenges to be segregated or on their own, so this is an opportunity to get them together with the whole community and help make them a part of the community because they're our residents, children, and grandchildren.”

The two most important aspects of this event in Groves' eyes is helping the Caledon community make the individuals involved feel like they belong while also honing in on the issues surrounding support for the families of individuals that have intellectual and physical challenges.

“It's the integration piece of this that's so important,” she said. “When these individuals are separated from the community, I hate it because they're important to the community as whole. This is where all the individuals—the volunteers, Special Olympic athletes, and participants—can connect and have a great time with the community. I think it's important that people in the community get to know our residents in Caledon who have these challenges. I'm disappointed that with the funding from the province, there's nothing available for these parents and their children after they graduate high school. That makes it even more important to raise awareness in the community and advocate for them because more needs to be done at the provincial level for these individuals after they leave high school. It's very expensive to put them in programs because it's a lifetime; these individuals can sometimes need 24-hour care and the caregivers/parents are burning out because they're getting older, too. It's not just more that needs to be done as a province either, we need to do more at the local level and that's why we want to bring events like this to Caledon.”

As the motionball event approaches, registration will be put online in the coming months as the Special Olympic athletes are finalized to help lead the teams. For those interested in volunteering, contact the Bolton Village Residents Association at boltonvillageresidents@gmail.com.