

# *Kiwanis Special Games*

Presented by the Kiwanis Clubs of CalNevHa Divisions 34 & 12, managed by:  
The Los Altos Kiwanis Club -- organization and operation  
The DeAnza Kiwanis Club -- equipment and venue

June 14, 2017

Dear School Administrator:

I am writing to request absence authorization for all Kiwanis student volunteers able to attend the 40th annual Kiwanis Special Games, to be held Friday, May 18, 2018, at West Valley College in Saratoga.

Every year the Kiwanis clubs of our region sponsor and produce the Kiwanis Special Games. They were created to address the physical and emotional needs of the substantial number of very challenged children in the schools of our region. More broadly known programs like the *Special Olympics* presume a rather high level of function. The Special Games exclude no one.

In 2017, 946 athletes from 60 schools enjoyed a day of victory, self-achievement, and positive attention. The force that spearheaded this uplifting event was the 290 Kiwanis student volunteers who came early, and stayed late, and made it happen. Without their bright, capable, compassionate, generous, creative energy at its core, there would be no Special Games.

For our student volunteers, it is impossible to imagine a more powerful community service project than attendance at this event. One cannot be a part of the Games without being moved. And there are not words to describe the joy that it brings to the hearts of the more than nine hundred athletes for whom this is the best day of the year.

I'm taking the liberty of attaching a letter written by a Kiwanis Key Club student volunteer a few years ago, describing the impact of the Games on her.

It's also worth noting that discovering how positive the experience of working with severely handicapped children can be, is not lost on the student volunteers, and opens their eyes to a whole new field of career choices that might otherwise have been dismissed. As the penetration of autism into bay area births creeps toward one percent, the need for professional specialists in this area is growing fast.

Thank you for your consideration,



Pat Emslie

Kiwanis Lieutenant Governor Elect, 2017-2018, Division 34

# ***I Had No Idea...***

This is the piece that Key Clubber Hannah Lee wrote about her experience at the special Games in 2004.

## **I Had No Idea...**

We arrived at De Anza, at their football field, 7:30 in the morning. It was pretty cold and we were hopping around waiting for the volunteer to give us our bright yellow shirts that read “Kiwanis Special Games.” We were given instructions to sit on the bleachers and wait for the participants to arrive. I asked, “What are we supposed to do once they get here?” ‘Lead your group and keep track of them’ was the answer. My friend, Blaine Kim and I looked at each other and shrugged, ‘looks like we won’t be doing much’ I thought to myself. I had no idea.

They had underestimated our role. I also thought that our job stopped after ‘leading and keeping track.’ We were given a roster of names, and our group was the largest, 23 kids. When the kids arrived and moved towards their group, we began taking role. That in itself was harder than I thought. You couldn’t simply call out names and hope for a ‘present’ or ‘here!’ So Blaine and I went to each individual kid in the area and asked them what their name was. Some responded, but most did not. I relied on the parents and guardians for help. From that moment, you could see the personality of each participant. One just stared right into my eyes. Another gave me a hug and told me how excited she was. One child asked me how many 1<sup>st</sup> place ribbons I had because according to him, he would win them all, since he had come ‘To win a lot! But I want to have fun, that’s the most important right?’ he said.

After that, we proceeded to the first game. Organizing them was one of the hardest things I have ever done. It was confusing enough to get them into rows and sections, and then different heats,

and also keeping them in the right places. Then we had to worry about exactly who threw the farthest, who threw the 2<sup>nd</sup> farthest... and the 3<sup>rd</sup>... in each section of each heat. This was hard because we hadn't memorized the names of the kids yet. But their intense enthusiasm and cheers for each other when receiving their prizes made me want to try harder. The next event was little easier to control, and the next was even easier. Blaine and I found that by the 2<sup>nd</sup> event, we knew everyone's name by heart. Although learning names usually takes me a while, it was so easy to match their names with their personalities and their grins.

We had to take role every couple of minutes, just in case a child tried to run away. We knew one; his name was Eric, who continuously ran away. We learned to show him that we cared about him and wanted to talk to him, so he would stay. Another, whom I will never forget, was a girl named Kristie. After each event, regardless of the turnout, she hugged me and Blaine. She even gave me a kiss! After the event, she pronounced that it was the 'funnest ever.'

I learned so much that day. I learned what appreciation is really about. The things we take for granted like walking, looking straight, making a decision of whether to drive or walk, and breathing on our own to others they are constant battles. I also learned another thing. In a way, I felt more incapable than anyone else there that day. I could never find the joy that Kristie found after throwing 3 softballs. I never clapped as hard as she did or smiled as big for her fellow friends, when they crossed the finish line at the zig-zag race. And she could never learn as much from me as I did from her in 2 hours. I thank Kristie, because really, I HAD NO IDEA.

Author  
Hannah Lee

May 19, 2004