

Kiwanis Special Games

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

The Kiwanis Special Games were created to address the physical and emotional needs of the substantial number of extremely challenged children in the schools of our region. More broadly known programs like the Special Olympics presume a much higher level of function. The Special Games exclude no one. The Games were first organized in 1979 by two Adaptive PE teachers and Los Altos Kiwanian Walter Chronert. Under Walt's leadership, spanning more than 25 years, the Games flourished from modest beginnings involving just the Los Altos Kiwanis Club to the regional event they are today.

Special Games XL. The 2018 Games will be held on Friday, May 18, from 8:00 AM to 1:30 PM. About 150 buses will deliver approximately 950 K-12 athletes from 60 schools to the West Valley College stadium. The Games will be run by over 600 Kiwanis members from 30 Kiwanis Clubs, 6 college Circle K Clubs, 21 high school Key Clubs, and a middle school Builders Club. They will be assisted by about 1,500 friends, family, schoolmates, teachers and caregivers who accompany the 950 athletes.

How the Games Work

The Games begin with a Parade of Athletes and formal opening ceremonies.

Groups. Each athlete is placed in a group with half a dozen others with similar abilities. Events, appropriate to those abilities, are chosen for each of the 150 groups so that each child competes on a level field with their peers. The events are tailored to fit the limitations of the athletes, ranging from the 100 yard dash, to dropping a bean bag on a target by signaling a volunteer who actually drops the bag. The athletes in a group stay together the whole morning, and compete, within the group, in the same events. Their age, mobility, and athletic abilities are similar, so competition within the group will always be fair. Every athlete is presented a T-shirt and a participant ribbon, and each event contestant is awarded a first, second, third or "best effort" (no "losers" at the Games) place ribbon. About 5,000 ribbons are given out. After the games, all athletes reassemble with their schools, and relive the adventures of the morning, while eating a picnic lunch.

Pushing the envelope. We are told repeatedly that the Special Games is the most important day of the year in the lives of many of these determined athletes. This is the one day when they are validated, rather than excused, for their physical capabilities. It's obvious from the joy on their happy faces that these kids are having FUN, but the value of the experience goes far beyond mere play. The conduct of the Games is formal and official and competitive. The value is not just going through the motions of the event, the value is in trying your hardest, and WINNING that ribbon as a recognition of your determination and success in a demanding physical endeavor. Teachers report that in the days and weeks after the Games, many of the athletes are trying new things, being more confident, pushing themselves harder.

The Process. Groups spend two hours competing in as many athletic events, appropriate to their abilities, as time and energy permit. All groups and events are led and managed by Kiwanis volunteers.

The Events. There are 18 events laid out within the college stadium, covering a wide range of skill levels. Arriving groups are formally and officially greeted, staged, coached, and recognized with an awards ceremony after each contest.



Remembering Walt Chronert, 1919-2007 Founder of the Games

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