

The Campbell Reporter

[Home](#) > [The Campbell Reporter Home](#) > [Cover Story](#)

0721 | Friday, May 25, 2007

Cover Story



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Buddies: The 29th Special Games at De Anza College was a memorable day for special-needs students from the Campbell Union School District. Rolling Hills student Holden Pence, 13 (right), gives a hug to teammate John Creelman.

Game On Everyone is a winner at the Special Games

By Emilie Crofton

Rolling Hills Middle School seventh-grader Holden Pence anxiously awaits the signal to start the race as he concentrates on the finish line 50 yards away.

At the sound of "Go," he's off, running as hard as he can to cross the finish line. In the end, he doesn't finish first, but that doesn't matter.

"Hurray, hurray. I am so proud of myself," Holden says.

At the Special Games, it's not about winning first place. It's an opportunity for the students to get together, see their buddies and participate in a friendly competition.

"It's just an absolute great experience for these kids. Our students are so enthusiastic and excited for this opportunity. It's a day that's all about them," says Jennifer Austin, a teacher at Rolling Hills Middle School.

The 29th annual Special Games at De Anza College for special-needs students on May 18 began with a parade at 8:30 a.m. and lasted until 1:30 p.m. The annual event is sponsored by the Kiwanis clubs, with assistance from high school and college volunteers.

During the parade, every school and athlete participating was announced. Handmade flags, pom-poms and posters were waved high in the air, as more than 850 athletes from throughout the Bay Area participated.

"They have the same enthusiasm, same excitement as everyone else. They just participate in a different way," Austin says.

Eighteen students from Rolling Hills Middle School participated in events such as the 100-yard dash, 50-yard

dash, obstacle course, slalom, softball throw and Frisbee throw.

Holden's father, Scott Pence, says it was a special day for the students who participated in the Special Games "This is so cool. Where else do these kids get recognition and accolades like this? This is my son's first athletic competition. I am very proud of him."

Holden Pence has been diagnosed with autism, but he is considered high functioning.

"He's very sociable," Pence says.

Holden and his family are members of a large church, where Holden is continually surrounded by people. He plays with the other children, and can imitate voices of such cartoon characters as Spongebob, Kermit the Frog and Bullwinkle. "My family is very open with Holden. We're not afraid of letting him try new things. Some families are overprotective and are afraid of their children embarrassing them in public. We just treat Holden exactly like his other brothers," Pence says.

The participating fifth- through eighth-graders at Rolling Hills were excited about the games long before the start.

"The students have been training for four weeks. We've been teaching them different skills and techniques. They even made visors and flags for the event," Austin says.

The physical training was not the only benefit for the children. Austin immediately noticed the positive effects the games had on her students' psyches.

"The kids who are usually very shy at school have been vocal, active, and have participated in class for the days leading up to the event. These friendly competitions give the students a sense of pride and confidence." Alex McGuire is one of those students.

"I'm excited about the race," Alex says quietly before her first race begins, hiding behind her mother.

After completing in the 50-yard dash, she pumps her hands high in the air.

"I feel great," she says, with a huge grin.

John and Diane Creelman both took off work to support their son John.

"There was no way I was going to miss this," Diane Creelman says.

Seeing all the students being able to participate together was quite a sight.

"I got so emotional during the parade. Everyone is rooting for everyone. These kids have just accomplished so much, and this experience is great for them," she says.

Like most families raising special-needs children, the Creelmans don't treat their son any differently.

"We treat him like any other normal child. All a special-needs child has to have is the support of family and friends. They are all bright and capable people," Creelman says.

The day was equally meaningful for the teachers.

"Everyone is a winner here," says Austin, who has been teaching for 15 years.

Building confidence

Rolling Hills students at the Special Games are part of the Campbell Union School District's functioning life skills program. In this program they are taught academics and skills such as how to use public transportation and money for purchasing items.

Every week the students take trips using the bus or light rail to places such as Westfield Valley Fair, the zoo, Christmas in the Park, San Jose State University, Baskin Robbins or an outing for pizza.

Although the children are in special-education classes from 8:20 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. they eat and play with the

other students at the school.

Austin, who began her teaching career as a high school business teacher, substituted for a special-needs class and "fell in love" with the children.

"I went back to get my special-ed credentials at San Jose State, and have been teaching here ever since," Austin says.

Karen Iott, adapted physical education specialist for the Campbell Union School District, is responsible for Rolling Hills' first-time participation in the Special Games.

"I heard about the games through another parent. I thought it would be fantastic to get our kids involved in something like this," Iott says. "I like to see the special-needs kids get the same amount of opportunity for physical activity as the non special-needs kids. Here they can get the feel of competition, winning and seeing other kids competing."

Like Austin, Iott once taught mainstream students. After working with special-needs children for a one semester, she shifted her focus.

"I found my niche. I love going to work," Iott says.

This year's games turned into a warm-up for next year. The students and their teachers are already planning for the 30th games.

"We are definitely coming back. I hope to bring even more kids," Iott says.

On this day all the students took home the gold.

"Holden is going to be talking about this for months," Scott Pence says.

The Campbell Reporter



Volume 8, Issue 10

www.campbellreporter.com

May 25, 2007

Staying Put: Prospect High rumors are just that; school isn't going anywhere **27**



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Buddies: The 29th Special Games at De Anza College was a memorable day for special-needs students from the Campbell Union School District. Rolling Hills student Holden Pence, 13 (right), gives a hug to teammate John Creelman.

Game On

Everyone is a winner at the Special Games

By EMILIE CROFTON

Rolling Hills Middle School seventh-grader Holden Pence anxiously awaits the signal to start the race as he concentrates on the finish line 50 yards away.

At the sound of "Go," he's off, running as hard as he can to cross the finish line. In the end, he doesn't finish first, but that doesn't matter.

"Hurray, hurray. I am so proud of myself," Holden says.

At the Special Games, it's not about winning first place. It's an opportunity for the students to get together, see their buddies and participate in a friendly competition.

"It's just an absolute great experience for these kids. Our students are so enthusiastic and excited for this opportunity. It's a day that's all about them," says Jennifer Austin, a teacher at Rolling Hills Middle School.

The 29th annual Special Games at De Anza College for special-needs students on May 18 began with a parade at 8:30 a.m. and lasted until 1:30 p.m. The annual event is sponsored by the Kiwanis clubs, with assistance from high school and college volunteers.

During the parade, every school and athlete participating was announced. Handmade flags, pom-poms and posters were waved high in the air, as more than 850 athletes from throughout the Bay Area participated.

"They have the same enthusiasm, same excitement as everyone else. They just participate in a different way," Austin says.

Eighteen students from Rolling Hills

Middle School participated in events such as the 100-yard dash, 50-yard dash, obstacle course, slalom, softball throw and Frisbee throw.

Holden's father, Scott Pence, says it was a special day for the students who participated in the Special Games.

"This is so cool. Where else do these kids get recognition and accolades like this? This is my son's first athletic competition. I am very proud of him."

Holden Pence has been diagnosed with autism, but he is considered high functioning.

"He's very sociable," Pence says.

Holden and his family are members of a large church, where Holden is continually surrounded by people. He plays with the other children, and can imitate voices of such cartoon characters as Spongebob, Kermit the Frog and Bullwinkle. "My family is very open with Holden. We're not

CITY BEAT



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

On Track: *Rolling Hills Middle School student Ben Carbone crosses the line first in the 50-meter dash at the Special Games on May 18 at De Anza College. This is the first year the school participated.*



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Friendly Competition: *Rolling Hills parent Diane Creelman took the day off from work to watch her son compete. She celebrates with classmate Ben Carbone, who won his group's 50-meter dash.*

Game On

Page 1

afraid of letting him try new things. Some families are overprotective and are afraid of their children embarrassing them in public. We just treat Holden exactly like his other brothers," Pence says.

The participating fifth- through eighth-graders at Rolling Hills were excited about the games long before the start.

"The students have been training for four weeks. We've been teaching them different skills and techniques. They even made visors and flags for the event," Austin says.

The physical training was not the only benefit for the children. Austin immediately noticed the positive effects the games had on her students' psyches.

"The kids who are usually very shy at school have been vocal, active, and have participated in class for the days leading up to the event. These friendly competitions give the students a sense of pride and confidence."

Alex McGuire is one of those students. "I'm excited about the race," Alex says quietly before her first race begins, hiding behind her mother.

After completing in the 50-yard dash, she pumps her hands high in the air.

"I feel great," she says, with a huge grin.

John and Diane Creelman both took off work to support their son John.

"There was no way I was going to miss this," Diane Creelman says.

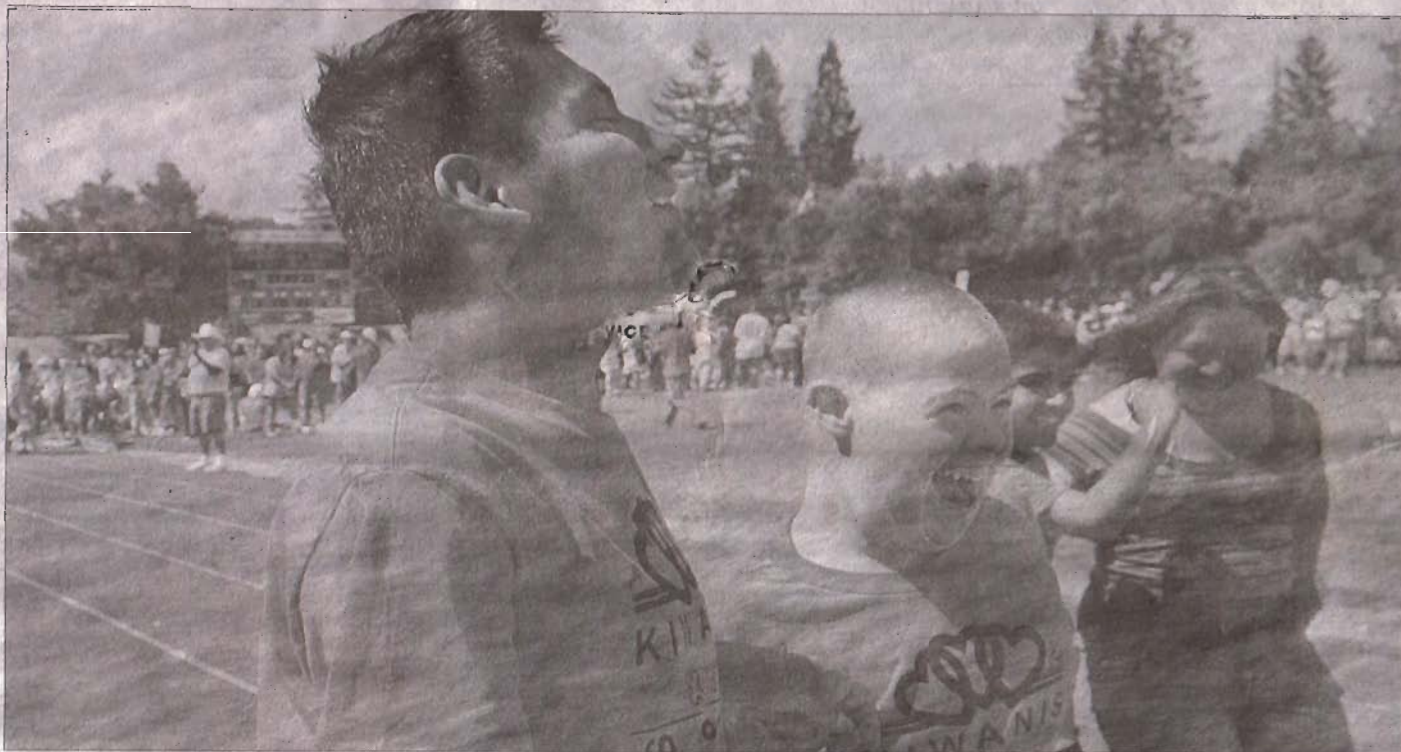
Seeing all the students being able to participate together was quite a sight.

"I got so emotional during the parade. Everyone is rooting for everyone. These kids have just accomplished so much, and this experience is great for them," she says.

Like most families raising special-needs children, the Creelmans don't treat their son any differently.

"We treat him like any other normal child. All a special-needs child has to have is the support of family and friends. They are all bright and capable people," Creelman says.

The day was equally meaningful for the teachers.



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Good Fun: Omar Campo (left) and John Creelman laugh after completing the group's 50-meter dash. Everyone who competed was a winner.

"Everyone is a winner here," says Austin, who has been teaching for 15 years.

Building confidence

Rolling Hills students at the Special Games are part of the Campbell Union School District's functioning life skills program. In this program they are taught academics and skills such as how to use public transportation and money for purchasing items.

Every week the students take trips using the bus or light rail to places such as Westfield Valley Fair, the zoo, Christmas in the Park, San Jose State University, Baskin Robbins or an outing for pizza.

Although the children are in special-education classes from 8:20 a.m. to 2:30

p.m. they eat and play with the other students at the school.

Austin, who began her teaching career as a high school business teacher, substituted for a special-needs class and "fell in love" with the children.

"I went back to get my special-ed credentials at San Jose State, and have been teaching here ever since," Austin says.

Karen Iott, adapted physical education specialist for the Campbell Union School District, is responsible for Rolling Hills' first-time participation in the Special Games.

"I heard about the games through another parent. I thought it would be fantastic to get our kids involved in something like this," Iott says. "I like to see the special-needs kids get the same amount of

opportunity for physical activity as the non special-needs kids. Here they can get the feel of competition, winning and seeing other kids competing."

Like Austin, Iott once taught mainstream students. After working with special-needs children for a one semester, she shifted her focus.

"I found my niche. I love going to work," Iott says.

This year's games turned into a warm-up for next year. The students and their teachers are already planning for the 30th games.

"We are definitely coming back. I hope to bring even more kids," Iott says.

On this day all the students took home the gold.

"Holden is going to be talking about this for months," Scott Pence says.

CITY BEAT



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Proud Group:

More than 850 students competed in this year's Special Games that began with a parade. Eighteen students participated from Rolling Hills Middle School in the Campbell Union School District.





Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Out Time: *Rolling Hills Middle School student John Creelman holds hands with his mother, Diane, in between events at the Special Games. The students plan to return next year.*