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SATURDAY
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The Peninsula

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Deverat Joshi, 6,
of Vargas School
in Sunnyvale, is
congratulated
after competing
in the slalom
course Friday at
Kiwanis
Club-sponsored
games for
disabled children.



KIDS FIND FUN IN CHALLENGE

750 BAY AREA CHILDREN COMPETE IN SPECIAL GAMES
AT DE ANZA COLLEGE, AND THEY'LL NEVER FORGET IT



KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Competing in the 25-yard dash are, from left, Sabrina Demarest, with help from her mother, Janice, and Daniel Gonzalez, with help from teacher Hue Peneveyre.

By Esther Landhuis

Mercury News

Some launched Frisbees, hoping theirs would fly the farthest. Others charged down the track, striving to be the first to reach an orange ribbon held by volunteers 100 yards away. Meanwhile, athletes with no arm or

leg function challenged each other at the bean bag drop, an event won by signaling helpers to release a stuffed bag closest to the ground target.

Storming the De Anza College football stadium by foot, wagon and wheelchair, 750 children representing 57 Bay Area schools com-

peted Friday in Special Games XXVII, an Olympics-style event for physically and emotionally challenged kids.

"For these athletes, this is the best day of the year," said Peter Bergsman, Los Altos Kiwanis Club member who co-chaired Friday's festivi-

ties. "It's both uplifting and sobering at the same time."

Put on by 12 Peninsula clubs of the service organization Kiwanis International, the annual event welcomes participants who would not qualify

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GAMES | Disabled children find fun in competition

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for the better-known Special Olympics, which require higher-level skills. The kids range from preschoolers to high school students.

Complete with an opening ceremony led by a torch-bearer and flag-bearer, Friday's competition placed each athlete into four events, grouped with children of similar abilities. At the north end of the stadium, skittle bowling athletes took turns toppling a set of plastic pins by swinging a ball tethered to a pole. Just outside the stadium, wheelchair competitors navigated winding, chalk-drawn paths in the figure 8 and slalom events. Other groups geared up for the softball throw, in which each participant got a chance to toss three color-coded balls toward a fence about 25 yards away.

"We notice skills here that we don't notice in the classroom," said Sadie Randle, special-education teacher at Weller Elementary School in Milpitas. "It's challenging for them, but they remember it. They'll talk about this in the future."

So will the hundreds of vol-

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— PETER BERGSMAN,
LOS ALTOS KIWANIS CLUB

unteers who came to help run the events and guide the groups from station to station. "It's such a joy to see the kids when their bodies can do what their minds tell them to," said Elisabeth Eros, a Redwood City volunteer helping with the bean bag drop. "It puts all my problems in to-



KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

Special Games competitors Friday at De Anza College in Cupertino include Jonathon Hang, above, of San Jose, and Tessa Cuffe, right, of Morgan Hill, getting a hug from Teresa Gonzalez. The annual event was put on by 12 Peninsula clubs of Kiwanis International.



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Whether they completed a course in 20 seconds or two minutes, competitors were spurred by hearty cheers from teachers and volunteers, and most finished with beaming smiles.

"Seeing the kids so happy, it's definitely worth it," said Humphrey Hu, a freshman at Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, who volunteered at Special Games with other students in the campus Key Club, a Kiwanis-sponsored service group.

For years, organizers have offered T-shirts and ribbons to all participants. They still do. But several years ago, the kids asked for something more: first-, second- and third-place ribbons. "You can see it in their faces," said publicity coordinator and Kiwanian Dick Hafenrichter. "They are tough little competitors."

Just ask 16-year-old Charlie Hughes of Terman Middle School in Palo Alto, who began the day with first-place finishes in the 100-yard dash and Frisbee toss. A little later, in the softball throw, he heaved his last ball practically all the way down the field. "It went to the end of the fence," said Hughes, proudly clutching his third blue ribbon.

The festivities concluded with athletes gathering with their schoolmates and having lunch under tents. But memories of the action and camera-



KAREN

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derie will live on.

Gayle Joslin, Special Games co-founder and adaptive physical education teacher at Juana Briones Elementary School in Palo Alto, knows how meaningful the event is for her students: "I

have kids who ask me when they come to school in September, 'Is it time for Special Games yet?'"

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