

Memorial Day is Monday, a day to remember those who died for our freedom. See editorial, Page 8



Sports
Eagles head for
CCS semifinals
Thursday.

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Los Altos Town Crier

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Community news for Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and Mountain View since 1947

Leveling the playing field

Kiwanis Special Games brings smiles, confidence to participants

By Traci Newell

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Local Kiwanis clubs, including the Kiwanis Club of Los Altos, hosted the annual Kiwanis Special Games Friday at De Anza College. The local clubs collaborate to create a safe and celebratory environment for challenged students to display their athletic abilities.

"Most of their daily lives are controlled by their disabilities. The Special Games is a day to celebrate these students' abilities."

*— Peter Bergsman,
Los Altos Kiwanian*

Approximately 900 special-needs student-athletes gathered at De Anza's track Friday to participate in the 33rd annual games. More than 140 buses delivered students from 70 different schools.

What sets apart the Kiwanis Special Games is that no one is excluded. The games fill a physical and emotional need for the substantial number of challenged children in

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ELLIOTT BURR/TOWN CRIER

Jake Atteberry of Mountain View High School competes in the 25-yard dash at the Kiwanis Special Games May 20. He earned second place.

Push to save prize-winning author's studio

Wallace Stegner's
writing nook could



"emergency" and
are devising ways
to save the famed



COVER STORY



PHOTOS BY ELLIOTT BURR/TOWN CRIER

Clockwise from top left, Hope, center, is congratulated after succeeding in the beanbag drop. Vargas Elementary's Darrel Liang runs the 100-yard dash with encouragement from his father. Terman Middle Schooler Alejandro Gaitan carries the torch for the open ceremonies. Evelyn Acevedo gets a high five for finishing the 50-yard dash. Charlotte Mendiola tosses the Frisbee and Daniel Renteria is ready for the games to begin.

SPECIAL GAMES

From Page 1

Santa Clara County schools.

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“This is the one day in the year when these youngsters are special,” said Special Games co-director and Los Altos Kiwanian Peter Bergsman. “They are athletes, and at the center of attention through positive achievement. For many of these kids, the Special Games is their favorite day of the year.”

Mountain View resident Denise Lochtefeld’s son Kevin, a student in Mountain View High School’s Special Day Class, has attended the games for years.

“Kevin is moderately to severely autistic,” she said. “He doesn’t get to do everything a typical young man gets to do. At the Special Games, there is no judgment – he is with his peers.”

The games opened with a formal ceremony and a Parade of Athletes, adding pomp and ceremony to the athletic contest.

“The students love to walk during the parade and show off their class pride,” said Diane Corbett, Special Day class teacher

at Mountain View High. “The games provide a sense of belonging.”

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The Kiwanis sponsors tailor the contests to fit the abilities of the athletes. Challenges ranging from a 100-yard dash to a bean-bag drop give every athlete an opportunity to perform.

“Most of their daily lives are controlled by their disabilities,” Bergsman said. “The Special Games is a day to celebrate these students’ abilities.”

Co-director and fellow Los Altos Kiwanian Charmaine Turbow agreed.

“The games showcase their physical and mental abilities,” she said. “It is a day of exhilaration and release. Just seeing how expressive these children can be versus how they are in a classroom shows how they can be changed positively by this one-day event.”

Each participant competed wearing a Special Games T-shirt. All athletes received first-, second- or third-place or best-effort ribbons for each event. Approximately 4,000 ribbons were awarded.

“Everyone at the games is so accepting and nice,” Corbett said. “I think the kids just get a really



great experience of being around people who aren’t ever going to judge them.”

The late Los Altos Kiwanian Walter D. Chronert launched the Kiwanis Special Games in 1979. The Los Altos and the De Anza clubs, with the aid of other local Kiwanians and student-affiliated groups, continue to sponsor the special games every May.

The games take thousands of

hours to plan. Bergsman, Turbow and De Anza Kiwanian Tad Curtis led the effort this year. On the day of the event, more than 1,000 Kiwanis, community and student volunteers staffed the games.

Key Clubs from the local high schools host the different groups of students and help them navigate to their different events.

“The people who volunteer for the Special Games, this is their

choice, and that is part of what makes this event so special,” Lochtefeld said. “It is just a nice thing that they give to these children on a volunteer basis.”

Associate and Schools editor Traci Newell is an active member of the Kiwanis Club of Los Altos and volunteered at the special games.

For more information and photos, visit www.k-sg.org.