

Special Olympics

Continued from page 1

of this program. Seeing athletes grow physically and emotionally year after year is so important. I want the athletes to gain positive life experience from NCSO!"

The members of the Northampton County strive to be inclusive, having a variety of sports and teams that everyone can be a part of. At one particular gym in Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania, the trainers and athletes are living up to both of these expectations.

Sokol 5 Tool Fitness is a gym centered around the ideals of inclusion and hard work. Sokol's Director of Programing, Erl Persson, practices constant inclusion and kindness in his daily life, and encourages those around him to be the best athlete and person they can be.

Persson is not only the Director of Programming at the gym but also the powerlifting program's Head Coach. He volunteers a lot of his time to help athletes of all ages.

Sokol is one of the few gyms helping to train Special Olympic athletes. This is their second year that they are working with the Northampton County Special Olympic Powerlifting organization. Doing this means they train athletes to eventually compete in a Special Olympics competition.

"My one athlete Mika is who got me started into helping with the Special Olympics," Persson said. "I had worked with Mika for about 2 years between baseball and exercise. Once he showed an interest in weightlifting, we started a more focused approach to his training so he could possibly compete in powerlifting. We had such great success with Mika and found it so rewarding that I looked into Special Olympics and found that Northampton County did not have a powerlifting program. I contacted them and asked if they were interested in having a powerlifting program, they said yes, and the rest is history."

"I train only powerlifters for the Special Olympics because that is what I have been exposed to with Mika," Persson continued. "There has been talk of possibly starting a new class for fitness or sport fitness in the future. I would be willing to branch into that."

At Sokol, Persson works alongside fellow trainer Michael Vandegrift to train Special Olympics athletes. Vandegrift is a 19-year-old student at East Stroudsburg University majoring in Exercise Science. He shows constant enthusiasm for his athletes while training and always has a smile while helping out.

"I got into helping out with the Special Olympics because of the opportunity to practice training athletes," Vandegrift said.

And while Sokol only trains Special Olympic athletes interested in powerlifting, the Special Olympics are not confined to those competitions.

"We have many many sports here in Northampton County!" Sechrist said. "In the fall we have flag football, soccer, and powerlifting. In the winter we have skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, bowling, and floor hockey. In the spring we have basketball, gymnastics, equestrian, softball, swimming, and MATP(Motor Activity Training Program) Events."

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sokol gym was not sure how the program would work, causing challenges in preparations.

"Last year we had six athletes and were expecting that number to double this year, but COVID-19 put a stop to that," Persson said. "This year, we have four ath-

letes in the program."

Despite the challenges, the gym has risen above and took all the precautionary measures to make sure both the athletes and trainers are safe while training. Masks are worn by the trainers during sessions and the athletes are at least 6 feet apart on their own platform. The gym is regularly disinfected and cleaned and athletes, with the help of the trainers, clean all their weights off after each use.

The four athletes in this year's program are Ty McKevely, Mika Kanofsky, Tyler Youngkin, and Logan Wismer.

Youngkin, age 25, is an athlete in the program who has a constant enthusiasm for lifting weights. Although this is his first year in the program, he still lifts as much as he can.

Youngkin said, "The part I like is having the heavy weights and heavy bars, I also like how it is every Wednesday night!"

Kanofsky, age 18, has been a part of Sokol gym longer than many other athletes. He goes to Bangor High School and enjoys all things revolving around athletics.

Kanofsky said, "I like how heavy the weights are, and I have been lifting for 3.5 years."

The other two athletes in this year's program, McKlevy and Wismer also share the love for powerlifting. McKlevy and Wismer both have joined the gym outside of the Special Olympics program to continue to progress their skills. Wismer attended Pen Argyl High School and was involved with the football program before he got involved with powerlifting.

The Special Olympics is not just about what the trainers and athletes do but why and how they are impacting the community around them. Sokol's efforts with the Special Olympics program brings the community together to help raise the athletes to their fullest potential.

There are so many people involved in the organization of the Special Olympics, and each has been brought into the event from their own experiences.

Sechrist said, "I am involved because of the athletes! They are a very important part of my life. I have many of the athletes from kindergarten through adulthood. Most of them become like my own children. I enjoy watching them grow and learn to become independent!"

"I do it because it is very rewarding for me to help people achieve their goals and to see young people learn to work hard, listen, and become good teammates," Persson said when asked about his motivation for his work. "These skills transfer to all aspects of life. It is awesome watching young people succeed and develop into productive and very well mannered young men and women."

Vandegrift said, "Training the Special Olympics is important to me because it gives me a chance to help out these kids and have fun with them."

No matter how they were brought into the program, everyone's motivation for participating in the event is the athletes, who are the entire purpose of the organization.

"It is important for so many reasons, but first and foremost it gives the kids something to look forward to and it provides a way for them to work hard and improve themselves," Persson said. "The stronger you are, the less likely you are to get injured or sick."

The outreach and effect of the program is one of the most important parts. Being able to get others involved and aware of what work the Special Olympics is doing is crucial.

Sechrist said, "The community is very supportive of NCSO! We have many local companies that support our program through fundraising and sponsorships so that our athletes can participate in all of the sports free of charge."

Events such as the Sokol Powerlifting Fall Sectionals help the organization continue to reach out to the community.



Special Olympics

Continued from page 7

"I think the community becomes more aware of what the program does and what our athletes can achieve through the competitions!" Sechrist said. "Our athletes can compete in sports through the Special Olympics platform."

Persson had the same thought, saying, "The community seems to rally around the Special Olympians, giving them an opportunity to shine."

"I think the Special Olympics impacts us as a whole by showing us that no matter who you are, you will have somebody cheering for you, helping you, and supporting you," Vandegrift said. "It is important to get involved because as trainers it's not just about us, it's about the kids. When they are competing for medals it is rewarding to see them. As for athletes, it's a time where they can just enjoy themselves and be active."

Sokol was also featured on 69 News in October for the work they are doing with the Special Olympics. "I think it is great that the media covered the event and allowed our athletes to be showcased during the Fall Sectional Event at Sokol," said Sechrist.

Sokol is reaching out to the community to impact something bigger than their own gym by participating in the Special Olympics program. Not just helping the athletes reach their goals and potential but involving the entire community to do so creates a huge impact on their lives and the lives of those around them.

Sechrist said, "If anyone is interested in having their athlete participate, please look at our website at nccspecialolympics.org to find out more about us! We offer programming during school hours and after school hours! We also would love to have companies sponsor our various programs and events!"

To conclude, I would just like to thank the wonderful trainers and athletes who put so much of their time into working with the Special Olympics organization. More specifically, the athletes working in the Sokol Powerlifting program are working so hard, and the entire community hopes they can continue this in the future. The program is for you, so all of us thank you for all your hard work and dedication. If you have the opportunity to get involved with this wonderful program we urge you to do so. Thank you again to the trainers, athletes, and directors of this program, and the organization as a whole.

Mrs. Spring Shank is the English, Journalism, Media Productions Instructor at Pen Argyl Area High School.



COME CELEBRATE OUR MILITARY VETERANS FOR A VETERANS' DAY CELEBRATION

UPPER MOUNT BETHEL IS HOSTING A FIREWORKS DISPLAY ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH UP AT THE UPPER MOUNT BETHEL COMMUNITY PARK LOCATED AT 1535 POTOMAC STREET.

PARK OPENS AT 3:30PM FOR THE DRIVE BY PARADE AND CEREMONY BEGINS AT 5PM.

FIRE WORKS SHOW IS SPONSORED BY LAMTEC AND CUSTOM LAMINATING

THIS WILL BE A DRIVE-BY PARADE WHERE YOU CAN SEE MILITARY VEHICLES, THERE WILL BE SINGERS SINGING PATRIOTIC SONGS, WE WILL DEDICATE THE FLAGPOLE AND PAVILION, ELECTED OFFICIALS WILL SPEAK AND FIREWORKS GO OFF AT DUSK.

ALL ATTENDEES WILL REMAIN IN THEIR CAR OR CAN GET OUT OF THEIR CAR, REMAINING NEXT TO THEIR CAR OR CAN SIT ON THEIR CAR TO SEE THE FIREWORKS

THERE WILL BE NO MINGLING AND ENGAGING OTHERS, YOU MUST REMAIN IN YOUR CAR AND 10 FEET FROM ANY OTHER CAR.

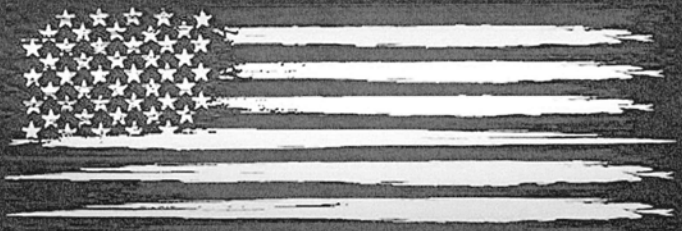
THIS IS A GREAT WAY TO CELEBRATE THOSE WHO SACRIFICED FOR OUR FREEDOM AND THOSE WHO CONTINUE TO SACRIFICE.

GOD BLESS THE USA!

SEE YOU SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH!



VETERANS DAY



— Honoring All Who Served —

