

Athletes Thrive at Ohio's Special Olympics

Mercer County Sent Team of 24 To OSU to Compete

To be a coach at the Special Olympics Ohio games at Ohio State University is to be a mentor, guide and traffic dispatcher. The whirlwind weekend when athletes from Mercer County competed in Columbus was jam-packed and over in a flash, said Sam Fledderjohann, Mercer DD's Special Olympics Coordinator.

"Athletes go there to compete, but at the same time, friendships are formed and confirmed, and the opportunities go way beyond sports," she said. "It's a nonstop weekend, and worth every bit of the energy that it requires."

The state games were held June 24–26 on Ohio State's main campus, home to over 66,000 students during the academic year. The OSU campus is a sprawling complex of centers and streets, buildings and byways. Mercer County's 24 athletes (who traveled with two chaperones and four couches), competing in various sports and events, stayed in a dorm on campus.

"We had our own floor—we took up a whole floor, and we were really excited about that," Sam said.

That was the good news. The bad news was that "we drew the short straw—we were farthest from the central location, and we had

quite a walk to get there, over a half-mile each way," she said.

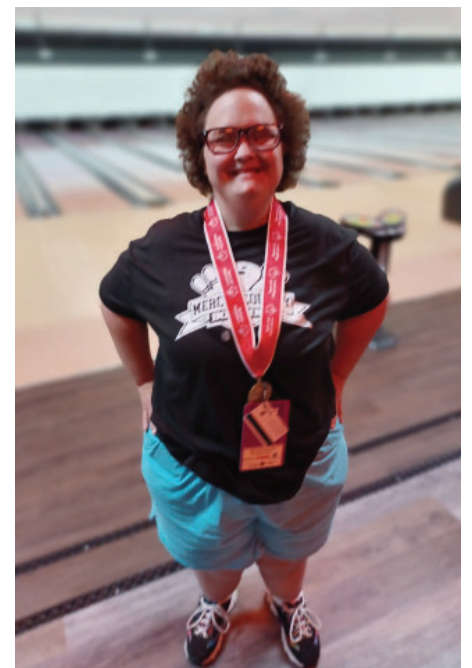
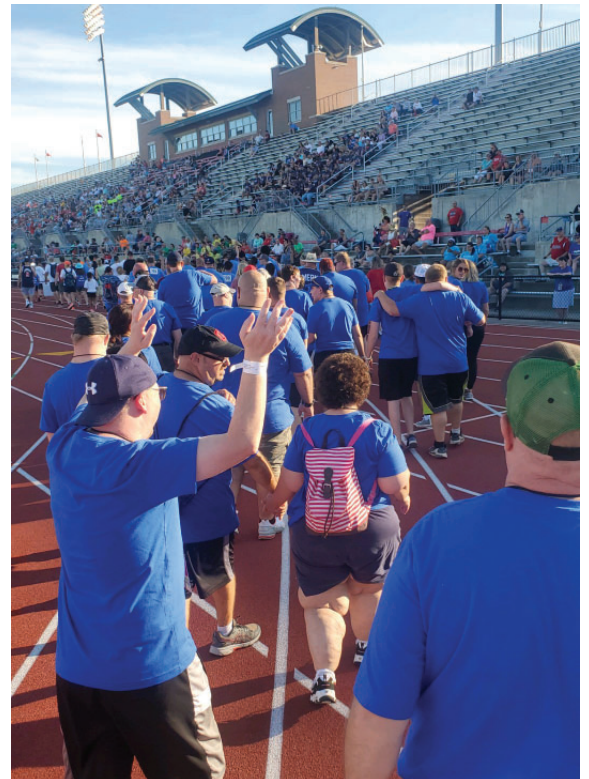
Lifters competed in Ohio State's Drake Center. Other events were held in the RPAC, a student athletic center not far from the Horseshoe. Bowlers were driven to a bowling alley on Columbus' Sawmill Road.

It was a challenge to keep everyone on schedule, and to get everybody up and out the door to the proper venue. Plus, it was really, really hot that weekend. "Everybody had to stay hydrated. Our athletes were so tired of hearing me say, 'Do you have water with you?

Let me see you drink it,'" Sam said.

Coordinating one county's contingent of athletes and volunteers was a big job—and it left Sam with a lot of respect for the people who organized the games, including the athletic competition plus many special events for athletes.

"You have to respect the care and thought that goes into that whole weekend," she said. "Anything on that scale requires a huge
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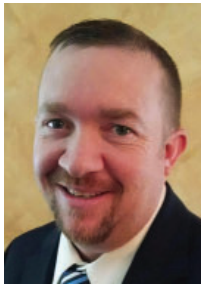


Above, Mercer County athletes take part in the opening ceremonies. Below, bowler Angie Borg-erding is ready to compete.

Technology Can Open Up New Worlds

Staff at Mercer DD are always trying to find new and innovative ways to serve people with developmental disabilities, and technology has provided us with some remarkable possibilities. While options are rapidly evolving, staff are willing to explore any potential solutions.

Text messaging and Facetime have been used by many of us for years, but it can be life changing technology for some individuals. Parents can send reminders and check in on their loved ones while living in separate locations. We can program pill boxes that dispense medications at certain times throughout the day and install interactive screens that allow staff in remote places to be available at the touch of the button.



**Mercer DD
Superintendent
Shawn Thieman**

This technology can also quickly find Youtube videos with step-by-step directions on preparing a meal. We have found electric toothbrushes that play music for an extended

brushing period to improve dental health, and air mattresses that blow up and adjust pressure to assist with positioning and changing pressure points. Some individuals who are hard of hearing use bed shakers to be alerted of emergencies during the night, and flashing lights for during the day.

Wearable technology has evolved in recent years. Some of our clients program watches to alert and remind someone to stay on task while at work. Families with young children are utilizing GPS and other monitoring systems to track their children, who may run from the family home and not possess appropriate safety awareness.

Security and accessibility are sometimes the only barrier for a person to be home alone for a few hours. Ring doorbells are used to help individuals and their families know who is entering their home and when. We have also set up keyless entry to allow simpler, but still secure, access into homes. The possibilities are endless and the

independence and pride that it allows are beyond compare. Technology is touching every facet of our lives.

Most recently, the Board of DD has begun experimenting with the use of an E-trike to allow for more transportation independence. If anyone would like to try the E-trike, please let us know—we are willing to loan it out to any of our families or individuals for 7–10 day intervals.

The world of technology is opening up an entire new world of independence for people with developmental disabilities.



Give an E-trike a spin—contact Mercer DD to schedule a loan of this nifty way to get around town!

Athletes Thrive

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effort. It's not that there are not going to be any issues—but they handle everything so well."

The result was great memories for the competitors, and a lasting sense of accomplishment. "Many athletes learned that they are more capable even than they knew," Sam said. "It really registered with them how much their coaches believe in them. It helped solidify their abilities, and I think we'll see every-

body reach that next level."

Those great results could not have happened without plenty of support from the team's home base. "We cannot talk about the success of this program without mentioning the backing of this community," Sam said. "Our golf outing alone raised \$6,000. This would absolutely be impossible without the donations we receive from local businesses and individuals. It's phenomenal."

Mercer DD has a levy renewal on the fall ballot. Be sure to vote on November 8!

This is a renewal of our six-year, 2.42-mill operating levy, originally passed in 2006. It is a vital revenue stream to continue the high-quality services that are provided to Mercer County. The levy is a straight renewal with no increase to current taxes.

Finding Magic at the USA Games

Team Ohio, with two members from Mercer County, places fourth in the nation in cheer competition.

What happened to Team Ohio at the Special Olympics USA Games in June was a little like a Disney movie . . .

But first, let's back up. The Mercer County Sparks cheer team competed in the Winter Games in Bowling Green, Ohio, where the team finished in first place and received the gold medal in its category. Two athletes from Sparks, Ramsey Leverette and Kaelin Overman, then qualified through their audition videos to be a part of the 10-member Team Ohio, representing the state in the USA Special Olympic Games, to be held in Orlando.

Then the adventure began. Athletes on Team Ohio traveled to Orlando on June 4. They flew directly into the magic. "Once we were in Florida, it was just like being in the Olympics," said Sparks Coach Rachel Craft, who accompanied the athletes to Orlando. Athletes from all states and all sports were given the attire they were to wear for the week, first of all to the opening ceremonies.

Then the cheer competition began. Monday's competition, worth 25 percent of Team Ohio's total score, did not go well. "It wasn't what we were hoping for," Coach Rachel said.

She studied the judges' comments, consulted with cheer organizers, and wrote new parts to strengthen Team Ohio's routines.

The athletes had to learn their new moves before Tuesday's all-important second round of competition, which would account for 75 percent of the team's total score. "I applaud the girls so much," Coach Rachel said. "I changed the routine three times

that morning before we performed in the afternoon."

Their hard work paid off in the afternoon's competition when they performed well enough to bump up their score and finish in fourth place nationwide. The team showed its grit and spirit to recover from a disappointing start and come back to shine the next day, Coach Rachel said.

"In my heart, they were number one. I'm so proud of what they accomplished," she said.

Their competition over, the team could relax and enjoy the many activities planned by USA Games organizers for the rest of the week. Team Ohio went to Disney's Magic Kingdom on Wednesday. On Thursday night, Disney opened its Animal Kingdom Theme Park for Special Olympic participants only.

It was a great experience for the Team Ohio and its many fans—there were 80 family members and friends who traveled to Orlando to support Kaelin and Ramsey, who are both from Fort Recovery. The fans roamed the games in their matching T-shirts, making an impression on all who were there.

"Everybody who went was so happy to have made the trip—it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for all of us," said Shelly Overman, Kaelin's mom.

A favorite memory was the opening ceremony. "It was so great to see the teams from all the states, seeing the facing of the athletes and how excited they were," Shelly said. "They were just so happy to be there."

There was such a generous spirit throughout the games. Shelly



Ramsey Leverette, left, and Kaelin Overman, right, with Sam Fledjerjohann of Mercer DD, at the USA Special Olympics Games in Orlando.

observed how cheer teams from all the states held hands when the winners were announced, all rooting for each other. And Coach Rachel was impressed with medical specialists from across the U.S. who offered free exams to athletes during the games. Athletes went through vision and hearing testing, receiving a new pair of glasses or hearing aids on the spot if necessary—and all free.

"It takes an army of people to put on the USA Games. It just wouldn't be possible without all the volunteers," coach Rachel said. "I've never been to a place where I saw so much good in the world, happening all at once," she said. "I came back a changed person, just knowing that there is so much positive energy in the world, despite everything you hear on the news. You come back with your cup filled."



“BE BRAVE IN THE ATTEMPT”



It was a summer to remember for athletes from Mercer County who took part in the Special Olympics at the state or national level. Clockwise from top left, Cory Sapp and Bill Nietfeld pose with a moose mascot; the Iron Will powerlifting team ready to depart for the Ohio Games in Columbus; Team Ohio the USA Games in Orlando.

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