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Dufferin student-athletes prepare to compete in 20th Special Olympics Track and Field Day

Written By **Sam Odrowski**

Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) students across Dufferin County will soon be participating in the 20th Anniversary of the Special Olympics Track and Field Day, hosted in the County of Wellington.

The event will be hosted on May 15 at St. James Catholic High School in Guelph in partnership with the Wellington Catholic District School Board (WCDSB), UGDSB, Ontario Special Olympics, Community Living Guelph/Wellington, Guelph Police and the City of Guelph.

Over 700 athletes of all ages and peer coaches from 60 schools will compete in several track and field and adaptive events.

?We are so excited to welcome participants from both Wellington Catholic District School Board and Upper Grand District School Board to St. James CHS in May,? said Nicole Hearn, WCDSB special education resource teacher and event committee member. ?This year our motto is ?20 Years of Endless Inspiration,' it is an extraordinary accomplishment to be at this point and we cannot wait to celebrate two decades of this event within Wellington County.?

Participants will compete in 50m, 100m and 200m races, standing/running long jump, and softball throw, as well as adaptive events for those with physical challenges, which include obstacle course, basketball shooting, they shoot/they score, T-ball, Popbottle bowling and a 40m walk/run.

?We are thrilled to be celebrating our 20th year of hosting this Special Olympics Track and Field Day.

This is a favourite day for students, staff and the community,? said Michelle Kearley, UGDSB Special Olympics committee member. ?I would like to recognize three very dedicated people who have been part of the Opening ceremonies for many years. Thank you to Kara Shaw, our pianist, Peter Hummel, our Piper Godfrey McNamee and the Pigeon Club. Also, we are honoured that two members of the original committee, who started this event, will be joining us on May 15th. Sonja Holmes and Steve Redmond will be acting as Honorary Marshalls!?

The event brings student-athletes from all parts of Wellington and Dufferin Counties together to provide an opportunity to build new friendships as well as renew old ones.

?Although the top athletes will be recognized for their efforts in the different events, everyone comes away feeling like a winner! I know our WCDSB representatives have been practicing lots and are looking forward to showing off their ability at St. James CHS,? said Hearn. ?Student-athletes take pride in demonstrating skills and representing their schools, the goal of the day is to provide everyone with an opportunity to do just that.?

Well over one hundred volunteers make this day possible, including a planning committee, which consists of representatives from the Upper Grand District School Board, Wellington Catholic District School Board, Special Olympics Ontario, Community Agencies and volunteers.

?Twenty years of gathering together! Our teachers, educational assistants and students work so hard to prepare for this day and we are so thankful for the hours of prep and organization from our Special Olympics volunteers and community who come together to support, plan and organize!? shared Erin Leslie, UGDSB Special Olympics track and field committee member.

?Best of luck to everyone! Have fun, and remember, ?Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt!?

The opening ceremony will start at 10 a.m. at St. James CHS ? all are welcome to attend and cheer on the student-athletes.