

Halton Hills Optimist Club raises \$1,000 for Special Olympics

The Georgetown Special Olympics community was thrilled to accept a \$1,000 donation recently and a tasty Breakfast with Santa, from the Optimist Club of Halton Hills.

Special Olympics communities like Georgetown do not receive financial support from the Special Olympics Ontario organization, so this \$1,000 donation will go a long way. Generally, the athletes families carry all of the financial costs associated with participation. This can make involvement in athletic programs difficult since these families already have an increased financial burden due to caring for their intellectually disabled family members.

The Georgetown District Community of Special Olympics Ontario has over 50 registered athletes and 25 volunteers. Every facet of their community is dedicated to enriching the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

There are currently four Special Olympic programs in Georgetown including track and field, rhythmic gymnastics, Active Start (ages 0-3) and swimming. Curling is available in the Acton area.

The birth of Special Olympics in Can-

ada: In the early 1960s, testing of children with intellectual disabilities revealed that they were only half as physically fit as their non-disabled peers. It was assumed that their low fitness levels were a direct result of their disabilities. A Toronto researcher and professor, Dr. Frank Hayden, questioned this assumption.

Working with a control group of children on an intense fitness program, Dr. Frank Hayden demonstrated that, given the opportunity, intellectually disabled people could become physically fit and acquire the physical skills necessary to participate in sport.

His research proved that low levels of fitness and lack of motor skills development in people with intellectual disabilities were a result of nothing more than a sedentary life style. In other words, their intellectual disabilities resulted in their exclusion from the kinds of physical activity and sports experience readily available to other children.

Inspired by his discoveries, Dr. Hayden began searching for ways to develop a national sports program for intellectually disabled people.

It was a goal he eventually achieved, al-



Optimist Club members present a cheque to Georgetown Special Olympics for \$1,000. Pictured from left to right: Lindsay Bouwkamp (Georgetown Special Olympics community co-ordinator), Sunny Mehta (Optimist Club of Halton Hills president), and Caroline Mitchell (Georgetown Special Olympics Rhythmic Gymnastics team manager).

Contributed photo

beit not in Canada. His work came to the attention of Eunice Kennedy Shriver and the Kennedy Foundation in Washington, D.C., and led to the creation of Special Olympics.

The first sports competitions organized under the Special Olympics banner were held at Soldier Field in Chicago in 1968.

Go to georgetown.specialolympicson-

tario.ca for more information about how to participate in the Georgetown Special Olympics as an athlete, a volunteer or a board member.

For information on how you can participate as an Optimist Club of Halton Hills member contact optimistclubhaltonhills@outlook.com

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