

Written by Tyler Hollis

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Thunderbirds Charities Awards \$120,000 Grant to Special Olympics Arizona

Thunderbirds Charities – the charitable giving arm of The Thunderbirds, hosts of the Waste Management Phoenix Open – recently awarded Special Olympics Arizona \$120,000 to help support and fund its “Return to Activities” initiative coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Special Olympics Arizona has only hosted a few in-person events since the pandemic shut down programming in March of 2020, but is planning to bring back its year-round sports training, competitions and support programs starting this Fall, including its Phoenix Breakfast With Champions in September and Fall Games in October.

“In-person competition is incredibly important to Special Olympics Arizona and we’re obviously thrilled to help bring these athletes back to the playing field after what has been an extremely tough year,” said Scott Jenkins, President of Thunderbirds Charities. “The Thunderbirds and Special Olympics Arizona have a longstanding relationship and we’re very proud to continue our support of the organization and their athletes who give it their all every chance they get.”

Fundraising was extremely limited this past year, and this grant from Thunderbirds Charities will help financially support SOAZ and its athletes as it prepares to safely return to in-person activities, programs and competitions. It also will help SOAZ expand opportunities to empower the Arizonans with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities to be healthy, productive and respected members of society while breaking down barriers they face and the increased isolation and challenges brought on by the pandemic.

“This grant from Thunderbirds Charities is so important to Special Olympics Arizona as we look to get back to in-person activities and events this Fall, something that is so vital to our athletes, both physically and mentally,” said Special Olympics Arizona President and CEO Jamie Heckerman. “With fundraising taking a hit during the pandemic, grants like these are crucial to help us get back on our feet. Thunderbirds Charities has been a great partner for many years, and we can’t thank them enough for their continued support.”

The purpose of Special Olympics Arizona is to empower children and adults with intellectual disabilities to live healthy, fulfilling and meaningful lives. This vision of acceptance and inclusion is realized through health, leadership and advocacy programs, as well as providing year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-style sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving more opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. For more information visit www.specialolympicsarizona.org.

The 2022 WM Phoenix Open will be held at TPC Scottsdale in early February, 2022. “The People’s Open” has been named the Tournament of the Year by the PGA TOUR four times in

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the past seven years (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019) to acknowledge the tournament's legendary status as one the most unique events in golf. The 2022 edition will mark the 87th playing of the event (one of the five oldest events on the PGA TOUR) and the 13th with Waste Management as title sponsor.

Thunderbirds Charities is a non-profit organization formed in 1986 to distribute monies raised through the Waste Management Phoenix Open golf tournament. The Thunderbirds Charities Board consists of 15 board members from varying professional backgrounds. The mission of Thunderbirds Charities is to assist children and families, help people in need and improve the quality of life in our communities. The organization's giving is directed toward organizations based or with a significant presence in Arizona.

The Thunderbirds were founded in 1937 with the mission of promoting the Valley of the Sun through sports. The Thunderbirds consist of 55 "active" members and more than 280 "life" members. For more information on The Thunderbirds or the 2022 Waste Management Phoenix Open visit www.wmphoenixopen.com.

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