

This Weekend: Special Olympics Arizona

Written by Dexter Presley

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Special Olympics athletes throughout Arizona will be gearing up for the Fifth Annual Tri 2 Unify Triathlon taking place Saturday, Sept. 8 to continue its rich tradition of sports and fun competition.



The triathlon is broken into two areas of physical fitness: Sprint and Unified. Both require an intense course, though the Sprint Triathlon is geared towards the more advanced athlete. It keeps with a traditional course of a 300-yard pool swim, a 12.5 mile bike ride, topped off with a 3.1 run.

On the other end, the Unified triathlons are beautiful in their own right. Uniquely, the Unified is more of a team event, being that the event consists of a partnership between a Special Olympic athlete and two Unified partners i.e. individuals without intellectual disabilities. Through this incredibly original pairing, the atmosphere of competitiveness is lessened and placed aside for something greater. Kevin Albert, State Director of the Arizona Law Enforcement Torch Run and participate of event for the past three years recalls his own experience. "The triathlon has been one of the most rewarding events for me. Participating side-by-side with Special Olympics Athletes was amazing," he says.

Arizona Law Enforcement Torch Run has played a huge part in this event. Many law enforcement officers take time out of their Saturday to join in on the festivities and other show up in uniform to put smiles of the faces of those competing. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has adopted working with Special Olympics Arizona for the past five years. Because of the physical demands of police work, the IACP felt it was a great way to get law enforcement officers more active and aware of the Special Olympics movement. Each year, the turn out for this event has grown larger and larger and more people have discovered the joy in being active for such a great cause. "Last year, over \$79,000 [was] raised so fundraising-wise, absolutely tremendous growth and participation—again, a lot of people come back year after year. And of course the word keeps passing out from other attendance," Albert says.

Broken into three parts as well, the Unified is the less rigorous option of the triathlon with a 50-yard pool swim, 2.5 mile bike ride and finishes off with a half-mile run. Both parts of the triathlon are open to the public and are great opportunities for those who are in top condition as well as for those who are just there to support the Special Olympics.

Special Olympics Arizona has raised more than \$250,000 for the Special Olympics and continues to provide children and adults with intellectual disabilities opportunities to take part in sports but also build friendships, courage and joy that transcend a sporting event. "Funny how Special Olympics Athletes look at law enforcement as we are heroes, yet law enforcement looks at the athletes as they can beat the world with their positive attitude and dedication," Albert says.

If you'd like to get involved, "we look for pledges, whether it's a dollar, or \$10 or \$50. Whatever people want to donate. We try to encourage people to not only raise the registration fee, but encourage family and friends to donate to support that person," Albert says. Sponsorships are available, and the registration fee for individuals, which could be seen as a donation is \$75 for the entire course or relay teams of two or three can be formed for the cost of \$50 per participant.

The Tri 2 Unify event begins Saturday at 7 a.m. at the DC Ranch Village Health Club and Spa. Friday is the last day that registration will take place. Grab a friend and come out and support these courageous athletes that are truly doing something special in the Valley.
www.specialolympicsarizona.com.

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