

Volunteers sought for Special Olympics

Hundreds of Staten Island's retarded youngsters are gearing for this year's Staten Island Special Olympics, an annual series of athletic competitions that could be their first step on the road to a state championship.

This year's Islandwide Special Olympics are scheduled for May 17 at the College of Staten Island's Sunnyside campus, and will include about 500 mentally retarded children from Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook, the Occupational Training Center, and CRMD classes throughout the Island.

Many of the winners and participants will be travelling to Cobleskill, N.Y., this summer to compete in the New York State Special Olympics, scheduled for June 2 at the State University there.

Last summer, the statewide games were staged at Wagner College and the College of Staten Island, drawing 1,200 Special Olympians and nearly 800 volunteers for the June weekend competition.

Al Mazza, volunteer chairman for this year's Island Special Olympics, said he is again seeking volunteers to help keep the games running smoothly. But Mazza said he faces a special problem this year because the May 17 date is a school day and most of the high school students who volunteered last year will be unable to attend.

"I would love to get about 150 volunteers," Mazza said, "but most of them will have to be adults." The volunteers will serve as teachers' aides, scorers, escorts for the children, and distributors of medals to the winners. The competition, mostly track and field events, will run from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Swimming and bowling events will be staged on another day.

Mazza said he has already enlisted the help of students enrolled in community

action classes at Notre Dame Academy and Tottenville High School, and plans to seek the support of off-duty police and firemen who came out in strong numbers last year. Anyone wishing to volunteer can contact Mazza at New Dorp High School or in the evening at 447-1724.

For the first time this year, an in-place Special Olympics committee has been set up on the Island, not only to organize the upcoming Island games, but more importantly, to provide the year-round after-school programs and training sessions for the retarded children that are vital to their continued development.

"Our main goal," said Richard Salinardi, chairman of the new Special Olympics committee, "is to have an on-going physical education program for the retarded. Our philosophy is that many times these kids can do a lot more than even a regular youngster, but they don't have the programs to develop their skills."

The Special Olympics Committee, which will meet year-round, also hope to raise funds so that more Island youngsters can be sent to the state-wide competitions. Mazza said that some youngsters who deserve to go each year cannot participate because of lack of money.

But Salinardi added that through the committee's efforts, this year's Island Special Olympics will be able to accommodate retarded youngsters in both public and non-public schools throughout the Island, and the response from the community has been encouraging.

"We're fairly well organized in Special Olympics now," Salinardi said. "Everybody's invited, and though we haven't reached our goal of year-round recreational programs yet, we will soon."

—JOHN E. HURLEY