

Island's Special Olympics

Everyone a winner at

By LAURA NELSON

More than 300 members of the borough's handicapped and retarded community showed their spirit and "oomph" yesterday at the Staten Island Special Olympics, held at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

And this year, the Island has the distinction of being the first area in the United States ever to offer a program of games for the profound and severely retarded within the Special Olympics.

"These games are for the very low-functioning, mentally retarded," said Richard Salinardi, Island coordinator of the Special Olympics. "We wrote up a special program that is now being used nationwide for the profound and severely retarded — it's tremendous."

Salinardi added that more than 100 severely retarded participants were able to enjoy the day as a result of this new program.

"Special Olympics is an athletic and recreational program for the mentally retarded, co-sponsored by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation," said Lois Dwyer, chairwoman of the opening ceremonies. "Our primary purpose is to improve self-confidence of all children and adults participating, since an improved self concept can have a positive impact on all aspects of one's life."

Yesterday's activities were possible through donations of time, food and money, from community organizations and businesses. In addition, there was at least one chaperone volunteer for each participant. The chaperones stayed with their participants throughout the day.

Among the organizations involved were the American Legion, Knights of Columbus, the

Blue Knights, Fraternal Order of Police of Staten Island, Foster Grandparents, and many Island high school service organizations.

"Almost every organization on the Island participated with their services or money," said Salinardi. "This is our fifth year and it's become a very community-type thing."

Each special athlete entered two events during the day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Events included a softball throw, running games, a frisbee throw, relay, and games for those confined to a wheelchair.

Each participant received a medal for each event they tried. The medals were presented by the Alhambra of the Knights of Columbus.

"In the Special Olympics everyone is a winner," said Marvin Badler, a member of the committee.

In a special presentation, the committee gave Gerald Sweeney a plaque of appreciation. Sweeney is the owner of two McDonald's restaurants — in Graniteville and Greenridge — and has donated hamburgers and drinks to the Special Olympics for the past two years.

"We don't usually do this because we have so many organizations helping, but this is a special case," said Salinardi. "He has given of himself and gone beyond the usual contribution."

Prefacing the games was a parade in which the Olympians marched and clowns performed. The Health and Hospitals Corp. band played during lunchtime.

According to Salinardi, the North Shore Kiwanis Club has pledged the largest contribution the committee has received. They are donating \$3,000 for 30 to 40 Special Olympians to go to the state games in Albany next month.



Special Olympians compete and have fun in the 60-yard dash, just one event in yesterday's activities.



William Digham, regional director of the eastern New York Alhambra division of the Knights of Columbus, presents three special Olympians with medals.



Nancy Fiske of the Staten Island Zoo shows off "Andrew the Rabbit" to a special Olympian during a break in yesterday's festivities.



It was fun in the sun yesterday as a special Olympian participates in the Frisbee contest.

S.I. Advance Photos by Tony Carannante