

Thrill

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experience, said Salinardi. While they are under the guidance of their coaches, the Olympians get the opportunity to do many things on their own, such as bathe and dress.

"It's like four days of independence," said Salinardi. "They come back a different person. All of a sudden they can handle these things better."

The Staten Island Special Olympians left Thursday morning for the opening ceremonies. The preliminary competition took place Friday. The preliminaries allowed event organizers to group Olympians according to their ability and ensured that the competition was equal, said Salinardi. After a long day, the Olympians relaxed and enjoyed a barbecue dinner and an ice cream social that night.

The games began Saturday and the Olympians competed for medals in swimming, basketball, bowling, weight lifting, gymnastics, powerlifting, rollerskating, tennis and volleyball. Some events, such as gymnastics, were held on alternate sites.

Saturday night was also filled with events, including a formal victory dinner and dance, and the closing ceremonies. The weekend came to an end yesterday, following a breakfast for all athletes and coaches.

Coach Christine Dickhut, who has been involved with Staten Island Special Olympics for over 20 years, says she can really see the difference the event has had in the athletes' lives, including her own 30-year-old son, Nicholas Derouaux.

"I've watched a lot of these kids grow up," said Ms. Dickhut, a Graniteville resident. "They don't just train in sports, they have to learn sportsmanship ... and how to support each other."

The Olympians showed that support as they proudly announced to visitors that 17 of their teammates would be attending the Special Olympics international games in New Haven, Conn., July 1-9. The

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Olympians, who will join 7,000 athletes from more than 140 countries, consist of 14 members of the female softball team, two male track runners and a female gymnast. Special Olympians from public schools will also participate.

Mary Pannese, 30, of Arrochar, a member of the softball team, says she is very excited about the World Games.

"I can't wait to meet new friends from different countries," said Miss Pannese.

The New York Special Olympics, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary, has become the largest program of sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with mental retardation in the United States. This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the Staten Island Special Olympics.

The Island Special Olympics winners are as follows:

Aquatics

Anthony Mussetti, first place, 50-meter free, 42:28; third place, 50-meter back stroke, 53:16; third place, 50-meter free relay, 3:14:04.

Richie Redmond, fifth place, 50-meter free, 46:59; third place, 50-meter free relay, 3:14:04.

James Anderson, second place, 50-meter free, 54:59; fourth place, 50-meter backstroke, 1:04:14; third place, 50-meter free relay, 3:14:04.

Kim Korzgwinski, second place, 50-meter free, 44:59; second place, 50-meter backstroke, 57:59; third place, 50-meter free relay, 3:14:04.

Kristine Garabone, second place, 25-me-