

Special Olympics Sailing Program Orange County, FL

Special Olympics is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing year-round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for people eight years of age and older with intellectual disabilities who wish to participate. Special Olympics gives continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendships with their families, other Special Olympic athletes, and the community.

Special Olympics does not charge its athletes to train and compete in its activities.

Individuals, corporate sponsors and special events support our budget. We receive no state, local, federal or United Way money. Our fundraising efforts allow us to keep all of our programs at no cost to our athletes and their families.

The addition of sailing as a sport to Orange County's program has been an exciting new program for our athletes and most importantly, it's an activity they can enjoy with their families, friends and others for many years to come. The program began in Feb 2004 at Rollins College of Winter Park, who generously allowed us to use their boathouse and three 18' keelboats.

Unified Sports® provide individuals with intellectual disabilities and individuals without intellectual disabilities the opportunity to train and compete together as a team. Our Unified Partners are a valuable part of the sailing program. They are required to demonstrate competent sailing skills that reflect the requirements of the US Sailing organization or participate in a US Sailing training class.

Orange County's program began with a 24-hour training course to four Unified Sailors, and within the first year introduced ten Special Olympians to the sport of sailing. In February 2005, a second class trained 10 Unified Sailors. Four were family members of the athletes and six were a result of word-of-mouth about the fun and excitement sailing was providing to all participants. Currently the program has 10 active Unified sailing teams. In May of 2006 eight Unified teams traveled to Clearwater to compete in their first regional regatta.

Ann Marie Keck is an Adaptive PE teacher for the Orange County Public School system in FL and the Special Olympic Sailing program coordinator. She is a certified US Sailing instructor and began teaching sailing for the American Red Cross in 1984. She competed in regional Laser regattas in Florida during the 1980's and sailed on various sailboats in regattas throughout the state, including the quarterfinals of the Adams Cup.