

Special Olympics Kansas

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NEWS RELEASE

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE AWARDS ANNOUNCED SPECIAL OLYMPICS KANSAS RECOGNIZES OUTSTANDING SERVICE

Mission, Ks – Special Olympics Kansas (SOKS) has announced Making A Difference Awards for 2016.

- ❖ Family of Year - Ryan Prothe Family – Gardner, KS
- ❖ Business of Year – Knights of Columbus Kansas State Council
- ❖ Coach of the Year – Sue Elliott, Olathe Trailblazers, Olathe KS
- ❖ Event Volunteer of Year – Denise Mentlick, NW Truck Convoy – Colby, KS
- ❖ Program Volunteer of Year – Michelle Leatherwood – Dodge City, KS

The Prothe Family has provided significant support to Gardner Gold Team. Carol was at the center of helping establish Unified Sports at Gardner Edgerton High School. She was determined to give not only their son, Ryan, but all other athletes with disabilities the opportunity to play sports for their high school team. Cary has coached basketball and recently stepped up to become Head Coach for their first Unified Basketball Team. Ryan's sister, Emma is a partner on the Unified Team, and his brother Owen, volunteers and helps at practices. The Prothe family has been involved with SOKS since 2011, when Ryan was 11 years old. He has been active in bowling, basketball, track and soccer.

The Kansas State Council of the Knights of Columbus will be honored as Business of the Year. Every fall, you will see Knights of Columbus volunteers in their bright yellow/red aprons selling candy to support individuals with Intellectual disabilities. For 42 years, the KofC has sponsored the State Basketball/Cheerleading Tournament for SO Kansas with funds raised from their candy sales. The 4th degree Knights participate in the Opening Ceremony in Hays at the State Tournament. The Knights have over 260 councils in Kansas, with 34,500 Knights helping raise funds and volunteering for Special Olympics Kansas.

With her position with Special Populations for the City of Olathe, Sue Elliott was Program Coordinator for Olathe Trailblazers for a number of years. After her retirement, she has continued to stay involved as a coach for the team. She is involved with 8 sports, and oversees athlete participation at regional and state tournaments. She is educated and proficient in the SOKS rules. Additionally she brings athletes to LETR events and other activities outside of athletic competitions. She has attended USA Games as coach and athlete chaperone. She is a dedicated coach and mentor for new coaches and parents.

Denise Mentlick, from Colby, is the Special Event Volunteer of the Year. Denise is well known throughout Northwest Kansas for her dedication to Special Olympics. She actively recruits new athletes for the games, and has a passion and drive to make SOKS great. Denise, along with her parents, Joe and Jane, have provided leadership for the Northwest Kansas Truck Convoy. They were integral when the first convoy was planned 10 years ago. Through the years Denise has continued to recruit sponsors, served on the planning committee, and organized truckers, all helping the Convoy to grow. The event has raised over \$350,000 for athletes. Her passion for Special Olympics comes from seeing her brother, Greg, smile.

Michelle Leatherwood, has been named the Program Support Volunteer of the Year. She is a certified coach in several sports for the Dodge City Dodgers team. But she doesn't stop at just coaching. She coordinates and leads fundraising efforts, sends thank-you notes to all donors, has lead the local effort in the Southwest Truck Convoy, and helps organize and conduct the West Regional Track Meet. Additionally, she works with Cimarron High School IHT class to design a brochure promoting the Dodge City Team. Her quiet leadership skills have helped build a talented team for Dodge City. Other team members consider her a critical component to their success.

Chris Hahn, President & CEO of Special Olympics Kansas stated, "It is an honor to recognize outstanding service to our organization, and these winners represent the best of the best. They have made a significant difference in the lives of our athletes, in our programming, and in our mission. SOKS is proud to recognize their accomplishments"

Special Olympics Kansas is dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive, respected members of society through sports, health and nutrition programs and leadership development.

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