

# 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 2015.

- ❖ Family of Year – Family of Jason Shirley – Wichita, KS
- ❖ Business of Year – Stanion Wholesale Electric – Pratt, KS
- ❖ Coach of the Year – Ron Just – Dodge City Dodgers – Dodge City KS
- ❖ Event Volunteer of Year – Jennifer Hughes, High-Touch Technologies – Wichita, KS
- ❖ Program Volunteer of Year – Tracy Ortiz, Kansas City, KS

The Shirley Family are members of the Wichita Independents. They are a quiet, strong, dedicated family to Jason. They are very helpful when new families join the organization serving as veteran mentors. Dependable, supportive and hardworking are just a few words used to describe them. John & Nikki Shirley coach, fundraise and take on team projects with a smile. Jason Shirley was inducted into the SOKS Hall of Fame in 2012.

Stanion Wholesale Electric has raised over \$1 million dollars in the past 15 years for SOKS athletes. They sponsor and host a charity golf tournament for their vendors and clients, and share the Special Olympics story with them. In addition to raising funds at the tournament, they regularly invite SO athletes to attend a reception for the golfers, serve as featured speakers at the awards dinner, and have them help register the players. Stanion exhibits a strong corporate philanthropic philosophy.

Ron Just has been a certified coach for 22 years, with Special Olympics North Dakota and Kansas. Ron has a great rapport with his athletes and strong ability to lead. He encourages them to push to be their best. Not only is Ron a leader with his athletes, he is greatly respected by other coaches and the Dodge City Management Team.

Jennifer Hughes of High Touch Technologies in Wichita Ks is synonymous with SOKS State Softball & Golf Tournament. She leads the High Touch employees to plan, organize and implement the competition, striving to enhance the event to draw more teams. She also leads an annual fundraiser and is regularly a guest on local TV and radio shows for the state event. In 2015, the Special Olympics North America Softball Tournament was hosted by Wichita, and Hughes was the primary coordinator of the event that drew 32 teams from Canada and US to play.

Tracy Ortiz of Kansas City KS is encouraging, kind and full of spirit. She has an innate ability to work with athletes having difficult times at events. If there is a problem, she will step in and resolve it and inspires others to lead by example. Ortiz has been a big influence in the Unified sports movement, and participated in the MLS Exchange with Sporting KC and Denver Nuggets. We can add brave to her accomplishments, as having raised funds and participating in the Polar Plunge.

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"

The Award winners will be officially recognized at the Opening Ceremonies of Summer Games, June 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7 pm in Wichita at Cessna Stadium on the Wichita State University Campus.

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.