

Cessna Aircraft announces its 1999 athlete airlift to RDU

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Transportation for Team USA Special Olympics athletes to and from the Special Olympics World Games, scheduled for every four years, is the responsibility of each state's Special Olympics organization.

Although some states do have modest travel budgets, attending the Games is a financial challenge. A unique alternative was first offered in 1987 and has been repeated every four years since: The Citation Special Olympics Airlift (CSOA).

Cessna Citation business jet operators donate their aircraft, pilots and fuel for what is known as the world's largest peacetime airlift. Their passengers are Special Olympics athletes bound for the summer Games. With every occurrence, CSOA has grown in size of the volunteer fleet and the numbers

of athlete passengers. As a result, resources of the state Special Olympics groups that participate in the Airlift can be diverted to additional priorities such as programs and sports equipment.

The 1999 Special Olympics World Games will be held in Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC June 26 through July 4. The Airlift will bring athletes to the site on June 25 and return them to their homes on July 5. This will be the fourth Citation Special Olympics Airlift.

Nearly 300 Citations from over 280 companies in 40 states are expected to participate. They will transport nearly 2,000 athletes from 27 states. The arrival and departure site is Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU). On June 25, Citations will be landing and departing every two or three minutes over a 10-12 hour period. On July 5, the Citations

will return to RDU to repeat the process.

The first Citation Special Olympics Airlift was in 1987 when the Special Olympics World Games were held in South Bend, Ind. Nearly 1,000 athletes were passengers on over 130 Citations. In 1991, 200 Citations transported nearly 1,500 athletes to and from the Games in St. Paul, Minn. The 1995 site was Hartford, Conn. and 1,600 athletes were flown by 215 Citations.

The Airlift originated from a request made to Cessna Aircraft Company Chairman and CEO Russ Meyer in the mid-80s. One of his neighbors approached him about whether Cessna could assist Special Olympics Kansas in transporting athletes to the upcoming Winter Games in Salt Lake City. Subsequently, Meyer spoke with Special Olympics Chairman Sargent Shriver. From that conversation, the

concept grew to encompass multiple states, and the Citation Special Olympics Airlift was born.

Arkansas Special Olympics Director Bobby Doyle described the impact of the CSOA in 1995, "...what's wonderful is that the pilots treat the Special Olympics athletes like the very important people they are. To see their faces when they're onboard the aircraft is such a thrill. It makes all the difference in the world..."

Minnesota Development Director Mark Smaby said, "We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to not only train an athlete, but to contribute to their self-esteem and confidence and enhance their future contributions as citizens. I feel the Airlift is a very important part of the whole concept."

Airlift planning begins two years ahead of the actual event date and relies heavily on the expertise and volunteer spirit

of individuals - many of them from the local area - plus major companies and organizations. Representatives of the group supporting the 1999 Airlift are the Federal Aviation Administration, Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority, Piedmont Hawthorne, United Parcel Service and the Experimental Aircraft Association's young Eagles Program. Pilots of the participating aircraft number 600 per day, bringing the overall volunteer total to more than 1,500 people.

The 1999 CSOA will hold a media briefing on Apr. 15 at 10:30 a.m. at the Piedmont West Hangar at RDU International Airport. A ramp tour and luncheon will follow the briefing. If you have any questions about CSOA, contact Jennifer Whitlow at 316-517-6488.

Athlete Profiles - '99 World Games

PRESS RELEASE, TINA WILSON '99 WORLD GAMES

John Greer, Team USA - Kansas: It takes years of hard practice and determination to become a successful athlete, but in Special Olympics, athletes like John Greer experience success when they overcome hurdles that have been in front of them for years.

This summer, Greer will travel to North Carolina to compete on the Team USA - Kansas at the '99 World Games. His experience at the 1988 Special Olympics Kansas Summer Games, where his team won a gold medal, will serve him well this summer.

An outstanding athlete, Greer, an 18-year old from Olathe, Kan., has competed for many years in track and field, basketball, bowling, aquatics, soccer, volleyball, softball and skiing for Special Olympics.

"I have a lot more self-confidence and self pride," Greer said. "I like to work as a team, while I get to participate in the sports that I love the most."

In addition to his Special Olympics accomplishments, Greer has been inducted into the Walk of Stars, a Kansas program that honors professional athletes, and voted the "Most Inspirational Athlete" for the Blue Valley Northwest Junior Varsity, his high school's men's soccer team, for which he has served as manager.

Greer has won many medals, but his main motivation is to participate in Special Olympics and to share the fun of the Games with his family and friends.

Chris Northcutt, Team USA - Colorado: Chris Northcutt was nine years old when he first rode solo on his horse. The horse took off, and Northcutt went tumbling to the ground, but Northcutt got right back on and has been passionate about riding ever since.

It is this spirit that will make Northcutt a great asset to Colorado's equestrian team at the '99 World Games. There, he will compete in trails, halter/bridle and western stock seat equestrian.

Northcutt, 18, first got involved with Special Olympics nine years ago. He participated with Colorado's team until it discontinued its equestrian program five years ago. The program - and Northcutt's involvement - started up again two years ago.

Northcutt also rides and shows western in 4-H shows independently at the walk, trot and lope. Northcutt, the only person with mental disabilities in 4-H from his county, competes in about five 4-H shows a year.

Northcutt was born with Down syndrome, yet also has had to deal with complications partly caused by his being born five weeks premature. However, Northcutt, has fulfilled a prophecy his dad made shortly after his birth: "He'll ride a horse someday!" Everyone in the family rides horses and competes.

Although Northcutt has endured many difficulties, he has inspired others. His sister, Alexis, 16, said he has taught her everybody is worthwhile.

Enter to Win Opening Ceremony Tickets

PRESS RELEASE - TINA WILSON, '99 WORLD GAMES

You don't want to miss this big event - but you might if you don't act now. There are a limited number of seats available for the Opening Ceremonies of the 1999 Special Olympics World Summer Games on June 26.

These tickets will be distributed to the general public through a lottery. Entries will be accepted through May 14. All entries should be mailed to: 4000 West Chase Blvd., Suite 325, Raleigh, NC 27607.

There should be only one entry per person. Each entry must include the person's name, address and phone numbers along with an indication of how many tickets desired (two maximum) and a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Special Olympics athletes will select all the winning entries the week of May 17-21. Winning notices will be sent out immediately. Winners will be asked to pick up their tickets at certain times during the week of June 21-25 at Carter-Finley Stadium.

If you have any questions regarding the '99 World Summer Special Olympics Games, contact Tina Wilson, director of media relations or Li-Chun Hsu, manager of media relations. Questions can be faxed to 919-835-4292.