

# Soars: Special Olympics 'builds self-esteem'

He said he first got involved with the local organization after working with a volunteer group through his employer at a state Special Olympics event at Emory University.

"I didn't see big participation from Forsyth County and that motivated me to get involved locally," he said.

Hancock said over the years he's worked with more than 150 participants.

"What a true joy," he said of working with the athletes. "They're very surprising, very ambitious and very determined. There's not a lot of quit in them."

He said a big part of the coaches' jobs is to push the athletes to excel.

"They want to be a part of mainstream competition and that's been an obstacle for them, so [Special Olympics] gives them the opportunity to compete at the local, state and sometimes even national levels," he said.

and the community. It builds self-esteem. I've seen a lot of shyness disappear and seen them blossom into great athletes and confident young adults."

To better foster the social aspects of Special Olympics, the program has expanded to other social events outside of sports.

Darlington said the program includes bowling events, as well as a number of dances throughout the year.

Since 2006, the program has also increased its community ties.

Darlington said this summer, a new manage-

ment board was formed to oversee many aspects of the program, such as fundraising, fund allocations, public relations and recruitment of volunteers and athletes.

The organization also joined the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce to "network with businesses and better connect to the community."

Some short-term goals include developing a more professional Web site and creating more streamlined and consistent sponsorship levels, as well as continuously expanding the coaching base, Darlington said.

Leaders are also planning the organization's two biggest fundraisers of the year: Battle of the Bats, a Special Olympics softball competition at Central Park which brings in teams from across the Southeast, on Aug. 27; and a 5K run at The Avenue Forsyth on Nov. 5.

Darlington said they also launch a new fundraiser later this month.

"We'll be selling raffle tickets for two round-trip tickets to anywhere in the United States that AirTran flies and for a 40-inch

LCD television," Darlington said.

The tickets will be \$5 and winners will be drawn at Battle of the Bats.

Fundraising efforts are essential, Darlington said.

"The athletes don't pay for anything, not even their hotel or food costs, to go to state and national competitions," she said.

"Special Olympics Forsyth pays for everything."

Darlington is amazed at the strides made over the past five years.

"We've truly been blessed," she said.



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