



# NEWS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Sarah Mahisekar, Manager, Community Relations, at 773-286-3883, or [smahisekar@aldengroup.org](mailto:smahisekar@aldengroup.org)

### A New 'Special' Special Olympics in Chicago

Chicago, Ill. (July 1, 2010) – The motto of the *Special Olympics* is "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." In recent years, residents of Alden's six facilities for developmentally disabled children and young adults in Chicago and Bloomingdale have taken great pride in participating in Olympics-style athletic competition for individuals with special needs.

Until two years ago, however, many of the residents of Alden of Old Town East, Alden of Old Town West, Alden Trails, Alden Springs and Alden Village—all located in Bloomingdale—and Alden Village North on the far north side of Chicago, were unable to participate in *Special Olympics* competition due to the profound nature of their disabilities. While they were excited for their friends who qualified, their disappointment at not being able to compete was obvious.

This disappointment gave rise to the idea of a *Special Olympics* Motor Activities Training Program that would give every resident the opportunity to participate in a *Special Olympics* event.

“When we presented the concept to our residents, resident families, employees, and the community, the response was overwhelming,” says Anna Johnson, administrator of Alden of Old

Town East, Alden of Old Town West, Alden Trails, Alden Springs, Alden Village and Alden Village North. “With the help of *Special Olympics* Northeastern Illinois’ regional staff and the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association (WDSRA), we developed a program geared to our more severely disabled residents. The concept is that the residents receive specific training throughout the year so they can participate in an annual *Special Olympics* Motor Activities event.”

The result of this collaboration has been a huge success. For the second year, a *Special Olympics* Motor Activities event was held on a Saturday in November 2009 at Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Roselle. Volunteers from the first year said they were so moved by the event that they encouraged others to get involved, and almost double the number of volunteers signed up this year to help residents participating in the event.

There were about 45 participants at this year's event and almost as many volunteers from the community. The event's opening ceremonies included reciting the *Special Olympics* motto, playing the Star Spangled Banner and ‘lighting’ the Olympic torch. Stations were set up all over the gymnasium for baseball, bowling, karaoke and more. Families and other spectators cheered the residents on as they tossed bean bags or knocked down bowling pins. There was a Sensory Station for exploring senses of smells, touch, and sight; and there was music and dancing at another station. With a little help from volunteers, some of our most profoundly disabled residents experienced the joy of hitting a home run at a T-Baseball Station, or kicking a winning goal at a Soccer Station. After each event, a sticker was awarded to all the participating residents, and at the end of the day nearly 50 individuals received *Special Olympics* ribbons commemorating their participation.

Looking around the gym, the smiles, cheering, high-five's, applause and positive coaching were wonderful to experience. Residents’ family members were encouraged to “Be a fan”--a *Special Olympics* slogan--and many volunteered to help with the stations. The proud looks on their faces were a sight to see, and all the hard work and planning that went into the

*Special Olympics* Motor Activities Training Program was rewarded amply with those smiles and the opportunity these special residents now have to "be brave" and experience success.

Going forward, this will now be an annual event. In order to help the event grow in size, Alden staff plan to advertise the event more to reach the community at large and personally visit local agencies that provide services for individuals with disabilities and invite them to participate. Alden would also like to increase the number of fans in attendance to cheer the residents on and increase our communication with family members and encourage all to attend.

*These facilities are part of Alden, which operates more than 40 rehabilitation and health care facilities, assisted living communities, memory care residences, skilled pediatric nursing facilities and independent senior living communities throughout Chicago, the suburbs and southern Wisconsin. To learn more about the Alden Network, visit the website at [www.thealdennetwork.com](http://www.thealdennetwork.com).*

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