

# SOLAMOTION



SPECIAL OLYMPICS



Monthly Newsletter of the Special Olympics  
Los Angeles Lions Club of Whittier  
Volume 11, No. 3  
January 31, 2021



Special  
Olympics  
Southern California



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello and Happy New Year SOLA Lions,

Wow, what a year 2020 was for the entire world!

I am glad to be able to welcome a new year with hope and promise as people get vaccinated, and have hopes of returning to a "normal" life, whatever it may look like.

As I reflect back on 2020, one thing stands out above all else is that we came together as a tight knit community of support for each other during challenging and difficult times. I think about the support the SOLA community has given to Larry Lopez, Brad Harmer and Brent Barry as they have faced life threatening illnesses and health conditions. Even though we were locked down a good portion of the year, birthdays and anniversaries still showed up on the calendar and we celebrated them each and every month. We continued to support our athletes through virtual events and gift cards at the holidays. We really did a lot together in 2020!!

I thank each and everyone of you for your participation in this special group of people. It is because of each of you we are who we are - a club.

Thanks SOLA Lions!! Here's to another year of camaraderie and shared support!!

Until we can all be together again stay safe and be well.

Lion Theresa

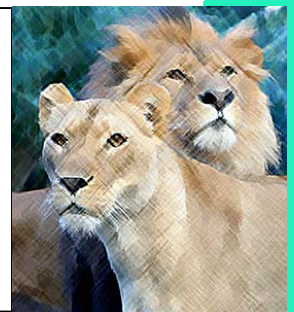


The Mission of the SOLA Lions Club is "to take an active interest and participate in the mission and vision of the Special Olympics, to help provide sports and training programs for any individual with intellectual disabilities and thereby improve their lives and the lives of everyone they touch." Our SOLA Lions Club was chartered in March 2009 and is the third Lions Club in the world formed to serve Special Olympics.

Our SOLA Lions Club meets the  
1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the  
month at 5:30 p.m.

**Regular Meeting**  
**Zoom Feb. 3 6pm**

**Friendly Hills Country Club**  
**8500 S. Villaverde Drive**  
**Whittier, CA 90605**

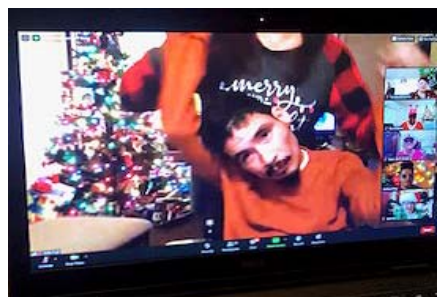




December 16, 2020

## Special Olympics SoCal Virtual Zoom Holiday Party

I want to share with you some of the comments from our athletes and their families on the Virtual ZOOM Holiday Party last night. It certainly was an enjoyable time, getting to spend time with our athletes. Seeing the smiles and hearing how happy they were to see their friends on Zoom just put some tears of joy in me too. GREAT WORK SOLA LIONS!



SOLA Lions Club collaborated with Special Olympics Southern California (SOSC) to sponsor a Virtual Holiday Party for Special Olympics Athletes on ZOOM, December 16, 2020. The event was a success with 150 in attendance for an evening of arts and crafts, visit with Santa, a movie and a dance. The Club purchased 150 gift cards from Target, plus 150 arts and crafts projects for the evening of the event, and a visit from Santa, Mrs. Claus and Rudolph. Arts and crafts projects and Target gift cards were mailed to each of the 150 participants. Several SOLA Club members lead the arts and crafts project on ZOOM during the event. Gift card holders, with a special message to the athletes, were designed by SOLA Lions members Wayne Martin and Jeannie Williamson.

This event was a much anticipated way for the SOLA Lions members to be in contact with the athletes we serve

- PP Lion Ruri "Peanuts" Pierre



**Special  
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# SOLA Lions Club Receive Honors

Dear SOLA Lions,

I wanted to express my deepest gratitude to the SOLA Lions for the wonderful holiday party for our athletes. The pandemic has been rough on everyone but especially for our athletes. To see their smiles and hear their joy in saying hi to their friends and then to Santa was heartwarming.

Thank you for bringing the spirit and magic into our homes and our hearts. It was appreciated more than you will ever know.

Sincerely,

Wendy Ellet

**Wendy Ellet**  
Senior Manager Sports & Programs  
Special Olympics Central Division



Hello to all of my SOLA Lions family,

I wanted to take a moment to sincerely thank each and every one of you who was involved with, and made, the SOSC central division holiday party a really wonderful event. Sarah was over the moon and so happy. She loved seeing all of you, her SOSC friends, SOSC staff, and seeing Santa, Mrs. Claus, & Rudolph just took it over the top. Everything Sarah made is now proudly displayed in her room.

THANK YOU for **always** thinking about our athletes and doing whatever you can to bring joy into their lives. You're all such special people to us and we love y'all very much.

Wishing you and yours a most wonderful Christmas and new year.  
With much love and gratitude,

- Jill



## SOLA Lions Club Honors A Very Special Friend

# Rafer Johnson

## Special Olympics Southern California's Founder and Olympic Gold Medalist



**Rafer Lewis Johnson** was born on August 18, 1934 in Hillsboro, Texas, to Lewis and Alma Johnson. The Johnsons and their five children would relocate to Kingsburg, California, in 1944. During his time at Kingsburg High School, Johnson received overwhelming encouragement from his family, friends, and coaches, but he specifically credits his coach, Murl Dodson, for the drive to try out different programs that he would not have done on his own, like the long jump or hurdles. Dodson went with Johnson to the 1952 U.S. Decathlon Olympic Trials, where Johnson's passion and focus for Olympic competition grew and pushed him to be the very best.

After his victories in the 1953 and 1954 decathlon meet, he began his college career at University of California, Los Angeles, where he would go on to become class president, and even win the gold in the 1955 Pan American Games for the decathlon in Mexico City. Johnson attended the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, and despite having an injury, he still took home the silver medal. Rafer Johnson would then go on to the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome, where he and fellow UCLA alumni, Yang Chuan-Kwang, would have one of the fiercest competitions in Olympic history. The two athletes battled for the top spot, both giving all they had to defeat the other. By the tenth event, both men were drained but knew they had to finish the decathlon with everything they had. Rafer had the lead by a small number of

points, but Yang was ready to fight for the gold. It was in this final sprint that Johnson ran a personal best of 4:49.7 and earned the gold. Although both men were pitted against each other, they both held overwhelming respect and support for each other. After taking home the gold in Rome, Rafer Johnson concluded his days of competing as an athlete.

Although his time in the world of athletics was far from over, Rafer took interest in acting. Prior to the 1960 Summer Olympics, Johnson was offered a role in *Spartacus*, but had to turn it down in order for him to be able to compete in Rome. However, he would go on to appear on the silver screen alongside Hollywood's greats such as Elvis Presley in *Wild in the Country* and Timothy Dalton as James Bond in *License to Kill*. Johnson worked in television as well, appearing on shows, and eventually sports casting.

Rafer took a brief pause in his acting career to focus on other aspirations, including public and social service with Special Olympics, and even participating in Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1968. Tragically, Kennedy was assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan, who was subdued by Rafer Johnson, George Plimpton, Pete Hamill, and Rosey Grier.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Rafer Johnson has been involved deeply with Special Olympics, where he got his start with the program in Southern California. He was still active in sports communities, and his daughter, Jennifer, and his son, Joshua, are both involved with athletics and Olympic events.

# Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Rafer Johnson



## Special Olympics

**Rafer Johnson received a call from Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968** as an invitation to the first Special Olympics Games in Chicago. He said that the event was such a positive environment and he wanted to help the movement grow. Johnson knew more needed to be done for people with intellectual disabilities so in 1969, he helped form the California chapter of Special Olympics after the success of the First Annual Western Regional Special Olympics in July.

As time pressed on, so did Special Olympics. The organization reached out to various states and countries, blossoming Special Olympics' outreach to individuals with intellectual disabilities who would benefit from taking part in the program.

In 1972, the International Special Olympics was held in Southern California at UCLA and Santa Monica College, welcoming over 2,500 athletes from eight countries across the globe. Then, in 1986, LAPD joined the organization for the Law Enforcement Torch Run to raise awareness and funds for the group.

Johnson had been a member of the Board of Directors for years, until he ran for President of Special Olympics California, which he won in 1983. He would use this time to improve Special Olympics, increasing fundraisers and adjusted the team to appropriately serve the community. Rafer Johnson was President until 1992, when he was elected Chairman of the Board of Governors.

It was then that California Special Olympics was divided into the Northern and Southern chapters to better meet the needs of their ever-expanding communities.

Rafer Johnson has incessantly and tirelessly worked his whole life, and it was the same motivation he saw in Special Olympic athletes that continues to push him to this day, as seen in his quote from Special Olympics: The First 25 Years: "There are lots of ways to find success. Hard work is one of them. I worked hard. If I knew I was going to win, it's because I knew I had worked harder. I think the most successful people are those who have someone helping them . . . In team work, there's much more strength, depth, and success. There are two sets of eyes, two sets of hands, and two sets of hearts working together. And that's why I am for special athletes - another set of eyes, another set of hands, and a heart working to be there for them, finding a way to help them be the best they can be. I'm on their team" (Bueno 1994). This exemplifies Johnson's commitment to help others and ensure that everyone performs to the best of their ability, and to give all the tools to succeed.

Today, Special Olympics reaches 170 countries, with over 4.4 million individuals with intellectual disabilities, 34,500 of which are from Southern California. With the ultimate goal of promoting an environment and movement of acceptance and equality, Rafer Johnson and Special Olympics have propelled this community to new lengths through the power of sports, team work, and hard work. Johnson took inspiration from the 1968 Special Olympics to go out and create something beautiful, which will continue to benefit the world for generations to come, and in turn, inspire others to do the same.

**Rafer Johnson passed way in his home in Sherman Oaks on Wednesday, December 2, 2020. WE WILL MISS HIM.**



SOLA Lions Remember "An Afternoon With Olympic Gold Medalist

# Rafer Johnson"

October 6, 2012





Our athletes are looking forward to becoming active again!

Sports, By Season, Played by So. Cal. Special Olympics Athletes

**FEBRUARY—JUNE**

**ATHLETICS BASKETBALL BOCCE FLAG FOOTBALL SWIMMING**



**JUNE—AUGUST  
BOWLING**

**AUGUST—NOVEMBER  
GOLF SOCCER SOFTBALL TENNIS VOLLEYBALL**



**NOV. — MARCH  
FLOOR HOCKEY**



**January, February, and March Birthdays**

1/2: Gwen Stanga 1/5: Crystal Dawes 1/9: Dan Skewes 1/11: Drew Sones  
 1/19: Sarah Noonan 1/28: Craig Peck 2/13: Mary Beth Duke  
 2/15: Rosa Masterson 2/25: Lilly Sanchez 3/4: David Williamson  
 3/8: Jay Prestelle 3/19: Dan McMillan

**January, February, and March Anniversaries**

2/14: Manny & Lilly Sanchez, David & Jeannie Williamson  
 2/19: Alberto & Sharon Montes De Oca 3/25: Craig & Ellen Peck



**SOLA LIONS CLUB OFFICERS 2020-2021**

Theresa Rivas.....*President*  
 Jesse Lopez.....*1st Vice President*  
 David Williamson.....*2nd Vice President*  
 Drew Sones.....*Secretary*  
 Carol Copley.....*Treasurer*  
 Jill Wall.....*Special Olympics Liaison*  
 Ruri "Peanuts" Pierre.....*Imed. Past President*  
 Penny Lopez.....*Sr. Director*  
 Gwen Stanga.....*Sr. Director*  
 Mary Beth Duke.....*Jr. Director*  
 Daniel Diaz.....*Jr. Director*

Dr. Jung-Yul Choi..... Lions Clubs International President, Korea  
 Larry Dicus.....Past Lions Clubs International Director  
 Claudia Miller..... California MD4 Council Chair  
 Woodland "Woody" Hugh..... 4-L2 District Governor  
 Harry Shuster..... 4-L2 First Vice District Governor  
 Jacky Lu.....4-L2 Second Vice District Governor  
 Robert Williams..... 4-L2 Central Region Chair  
 Lenora Perri.....4-L2 Zone B Central Chair



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