

## Special Olympics athletes celebrate holiday season

By: Terry Brlas

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Photo by TERRY BRLAS  
Cleveland Indians mascot Slider leads Special Olympians in a conga line style dance during the Strongsville Special Olympics holiday party on Saturday, Dec. 11, at the Ehrnfelt Recreation Center.

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By TERRY BRLAS  
Strongsville Post editor

Strongsville Special Olympic athletes and their families celebrated the season with the organization's 15th annual holiday party at the Ehrnfelt Recreation Center on Saturday, Dec. 11.

The morning was a festive culmination to a successful year for the athletes who competed in basketball, bowling, cycling, golf, ice skating, soccer, swimming and track and field.

The Strongsville City Club, which underwrites the local Special Olympics, were there with "sleigh" bells on serving food and cracking wise. Well, at least President David Knowles who served as master of ceremonies was cracking wise.

"What did the two fish say when they swam into the brick wall? Dam," he said. "I went to a basketball game and the ball kept getting bigger and bigger and then it hit me. What did they call the pig at karate school? Pork Chop."

While there were groans from the audience for Knowles' jokes, there were no groans regarding the food. A tasty breakfast of pancakes, sausage, scrambled eggs, bacon, cookies and donuts was served by City Club members including Mayor Thomas Perciak.

The Strongsville City Club has been involved with Special Olympics for 25-plus years according to Knowles.

"City Club members really look forward to this event not because they get a free breakfast, but because we get to hang out with all of you and our families get to spend the morning together," he said. "All of the members enjoy being part of Special Olympics. It's quite enjoyable for all the members."

Dana Martin, director of the Strongsville Special Olympics and physical education teacher at Whitney Elementary School, used a touch of self-deprecating humor when she said "I do nothing

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Photo by TERRY BRLAS  
Pepperjack, the balloon clown, finishes a creation for William Brown at the Strongsville Special Olympics holiday party.

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for this. I just accept the RSVPs."

Nevertheless there was a lot of accepting as approximately 300 individuals attended this year's event.

Martin did acknowledge City Club's generous support of the organization.

"Other cities have to work for their money. They don't get the support we do. This is just awesome. I just love these guys," she said.

Vic Kosik normally has to work on Saturdays. Because of his schedule this was the first Special Olympics holiday party that he attended.

"This is a tremendous event and it's for the kids," he said. "My wife normally brings my son Matthew here. This is a very nice program they put on."

Bob and Shelly Orlandi kept toes tapping with a variety of holiday musical numbers. Shelly traveled through the audience, microphone in hand, during "Jingle Bells" getting athletes to chime in during the chorus.

A beautifully prepared 20-minute slide show of the year's events with appropriate background music was presented.

The line for Pepperjack, a balloon clown, was long. The line behind Slider, the Cleveland Indians mascot, may have been longer as he led athletes throughout the room in a single file conga style dance.

The grand finale entrance was reserved for Santa Claus, who thrilled athletes and their families with his appearance. Each athlete received a warm-up jacket.

The next big event for Strongsville Special Olympics was the state swim meet in Columbus, held Dec. 18-19 on The Ohio State University campus.