



Bethalto Police Carry Torch for Special Olympics Illinois

June 10 2013 9:08 AM

Beginning Sunday, June 9, law enforcement officers across Illinois will take to the streets, highways and roads of the state, carrying the torch (“Flame of Hope”) to help raise funds for their hometown sports heroes – the athletes of Special Olympics Illinois. About 3,000 officers representing every branch of law enforcement will cover the 23 legs of the Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run.

Bethalto officers are again participating in the Torch Run by carrying the torch from Bethalto to Wood River along Routes 140 and 111. There will be a kick-off event at 9 a. m. at TheBank of Edwardsville on Route 140 before officers begin their journey west on route 140 to Route 111 where they will turn south and pass the torch to Wood River Police at Pritchford Funeral Home.

Bethalto has been involved in the Law Enforcement Torch Run for several years, raising nearly \$150,000 during that time. In 2008, the Bethalto Police Department led all departments in the state of Illinois in Torch Run fundraising and is a perennial Top 5 finisher.

“We are very proud of our involvement in the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Illinois,” said Bethalto Mayor Alan Winslow, who participated directly in the Torch Run during his seven-year tenure as Bethalto Police Chief and helped create the Bethalto Special Olympic Softball League. “We have seen first-hand how Special Olympics can transform lives through sport.”

The Torch Run is the single largest year-round fundraising vehicle benefiting Special Olympics Illinois. The annual intrastate relay and its various fundraising projects have two goals: to raise money and to gain awareness for the athletes who participate in Special Olympics Illinois. Each year, officers in Illinois run more than 1,500 miles carrying the “Flame of Hope” through the streets of their hometowns and deliver it to the State Summer Games in Normal in June.

On Friday, June 14, legs of the run from all over the state will converge on Normal. That evening at dusk, in a dramatic moment during Opening Ceremonies of the Special Olympics Illinois State Summer Games, officers from every leg of the Torch Run will enter Illinois State University's Hancock Stadium with torches lit and hand off the "Flame of Hope" to Special Olympics athletes. When the cauldron is lit and the games declared open, nearly 4,000 athletes will continue three days of competition and celebration.

When it began in 1986, the Law Enforcement Torch Run raised \$14,000 in Illinois. It has since grown into the largest fundraising vehicle for Special Olympics Illinois, raising nearly \$28 million since 1986. The Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run raised more than \$2.97 million in 2012, making it the second highest grossing program in the world.

Perhaps one of the most motivating factors for law enforcement officers is the knowledge that their efforts will benefit the athletes of Special Olympics Illinois. "We are involved in the Torch Run because it's such a genuine project," says Eric Smith, director of the Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run and Chief of the Sherman Police Department. "We're helping Special Olympics athletes truly experience sports and competition while learning life skills that transform their lives."

"Thanks to the Law Enforcement Torch Run® and its corporate sponsors, Special Olympics Illinois is better able to reach more athletes and offer them more year-round training and competition opportunities. Special Olympics Illinois athletes are able to participate in the program free of charge thanks to sponsors like the Law Enforcement Torch Run," says Dave Breen, Special Olympics Illinois president and CEO. "Special Olympics programs help the more than 21,300 athletes with intellectual disabilities and nearly 13,000 Young Athletes ages 2-7 with and without intellectual disabilities in Illinois develop improved physical fitness and self-esteem."

In addition to donations for running, officers raise funds statewide in various ways throughout the year, including Polar Plunges, rooftop sits, PlanePull, Truck Convoy, raffles, bike rides, golf tournaments, and more.