

Special Olympics Torch Run takes historic virtual turn

You read that right. Ontario made history this past Saturday, September 19, for Special Olympics Athletes.

The day marked the annual Ontario Law Enforcement Torch Run and run director Karen Richards hailed participants for "keeping the flame alive" during these difficult times.

"Today (Saturday), is Ontario's first ever, Global Virtual Torch Run," said Ms. Richards in a social media video. "As guardians of the flame, members of law enforcement and our volunteers and supporters, we spend countless hours raising awareness and funds for Special Olympics.

Virtually high-fiving supporters in the video, Ms. Richards thanked everyone's efforts for "keeping the flame alive, during the pandemic."

Friends and family were encouraged to either walk, jog or run in support of Special Olympics Ontario this year.

"It was pretty amazing the feedback we got from our police services and all of our other law enforcement partners within the province," said Law Enforcement Torch Run Manager Brock Robinson. "The community Special Olympics side came out to support as well. [We] saw a lot of great photos of athletes with their families out doing the torch run in their torch run shirts. That's why you do it."

Participants were also encouraged to donate to the cause. The goal is to raise \$33,000 to celebrate 33 years of being one of the largest supporters for Special Olympics.

Many members of law enforcement, correctional officers, and border police fit the bill. Locally, South Simcoe Police and York Regional Police and personnel from across Southern Ontario shared their support via Twitter over the weekend.

Peel Regional Police Deputy Chief Marc Andrews shared a photo of his smart watch, which displayed his kilometres ran (6.67), calories burnt (467) and time of completion (89:05).

In total, 292 people participated and \$34,105.33 was raised in support of Special Olympics, exceeding the intended target.

"[The money] goes into the communities. What we do is we offer anybody who donated, allocate that to their local Special Olympics community, which then they fundraise and they did a pretty good job getting the word out. That helps them with facility rentals, equipment needs, uniform needs at this time," Robinson said.

"There is a return to program process that our communities are currently going through right now and that will help them get back to regular weekly programming on a grassroots level."

This includes any PPE that is needed to keep everyone safe at this time.

On the website, all the winners were also published.

The Early Bird Highest Individual Fundraiser as of August 31 is Barbara King. She takes home the YETI Tumbler prize.

The Overall Highest Team Fundraiser award went to Windsor Police Auxiliary Service and they will receive a \$100 Tim Hortons gift card.

The overall highest individual fundraiser as of September 19 is Claude Dupre, who takes home an Xbox One. Dupre donated \$4,021.

Finally, the best photo using the hashtag #GlobalTorchRun goes to Inspector Marc Brunette of the Greater Sudbury Police Service. He takes home a YETI Tumbler as well.

For an event that normally runs midway through the summer, Robinson says it was particularly challenging raising awareness of the cause digitally.

These runs normally happen between June, July and August physically, but with COVID-19 still having an impact, it was incumbent of the Law Enforcement Torch Run of Ontario to remain in connection with Special Olympics Ontario and ultimately reported a successful weekend.

By Robert Belardi