

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2011



CONTACT:

Kathy Muffenbier
303.592.1361 (Office)
303.720.0203 (Cell)
km@specialolympicsco.org

Special Olympics Colorado Athletes Head to Greece for World Games

SOCO Athletes Join 315 Teammates and 125 Coaches from Special Olympics Team USA on the Journey to Greece for the Country's Largest Sporting Event of the Year

DENVER, Colo. -- Three Special Olympic Colorado athletes -- **Mai-Lin Hegel (Denver)**, **Frank Ushiyama (Longmont)** and **Chelsea Wirsing (Boulder)** -- will depart from Denver International Airport this Saturday and head to Athens, Greece, as part of Team USA for the Special Olympics World Summer Games ATHENS 2011. Over 7,000 athletes from nearly 180 countries will compete from June 25 - July 4th. The event will draw more than 25,000 volunteers, 3,000 event officials and thousands of families, spectators and journalists from every continent.

Hegel, Ushiyama and Wirsing will join over 300 athletes from around the country to comprise Team USA, which will compete in 22 Olympic-type sports, including aquatics (Hegel), bocce (Wirsing) and bowling (Ushiyama). Opening ceremonies are scheduled for Saturday, June 25, while closing ceremonies will take place Monday, July 4th.

In addition to the three aforementioned athletes, Special Olympics Colorado's contingency includes Chaka Sutton, Executive Vice President of Programs for SOCO; Jenny Chase, Competition and Education Manager for SOCO; Mandi DeWitt, Young Athletes/Project UNIFY Manager for SOCO; Vicky Matarazzo, volunteer from Lakewood; Sergeant Ralph Mauer, LETR Officer from the Fountain Police Department; plus Ben and Sarah Barnhart, Youth Activation Committee members from Greenwood Village. Sutton will serve as sports manager for powerlifting. Chase and Matarazzo will serve as coaches for Team USA in the sports of bowling and tennis, respectively. DeWitt and both Barnharts will participate in the Global Youth Activation Summit. Mauer will join fellow officers from around the world on the Final Leg of the Law Enforcement Torch Run Flame of Hope to the Games.

These World Games will be the milestone event of a long-lasting movement, founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, to create a world of inclusion and acceptance. In Athens, the birthplace of modern sport, where the true values of competition were born, the talents and skills of Special Olympics athletes will remind us what the World Games are really about, where all participants are winners in their struggle for respect, inclusion and unity.

This will be the 13th Special Olympics World Summer Games. Every two years, thousands of Special Olympics athletes worldwide come together to showcase their athletic skills and celebrate the spirit of Special Olympics. Alternating between Summer Games and Winter Games, Special Olympics World Games bring public attention to the talents and capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities, helping to change attitudes and break down barriers that excluded them from the mainstream of the community.

Sponsors of Special Olympics Team USA are Procter & Gamble, the American Federation of Teachers and MTM Recognition. Special thanks go to Champion, the official performance apparel supplier of Special Olympics Team USA. Loudmouth is a product supplier of Special Olympics Team USA's golf team.

For more information on Special Olympics Team USA, visit <http://www.specialolympicsteamusa.org> or find additional information at Special Olympics World Summer Games official website: <http://www.athens2011.org>

Photo and Interview Opportunities: Special Olympics Colorado athletes and coaches will be departing DIA this Saturday morning at 10 a.m. Interviews and photos will take place from 8 a.m. - 8:20 a.m. at the Southwest Airline Ticket Counter. Please contact Kathy Muffenbier for further information.

Support. Volunteer. Coach. Compete. Special Olympics Colorado. Be a FAN!