

ST. CROIX TRAIL BLAZERS

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 29 | NOVEMBER 2025

Special Olympics USA Games

From June 20-26, 2026, Special Olympics USA Games will bring approximately 3,000 athletes, 1,500 coaches, and 10,000 volunteers from across the United States to Minnesota at the University of Minnesota, the official host venue. In addition to the University, events will also be held at other venues including the National Sports Center in Blaine.

The games will include athletics (track and field), basketball, bocce, bowling, competitive cheer, cornhole, flag football, golf, gymnastics, pickleball, powerlifting, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, and volleyball. USA Games started in 2006 and have been held every four years since offering summer sports.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS
USA GAMES
MINNESOTA 2026

Teams are notified of qualifying athletes who then decide whether or not to apply for Games. There are application deadlines individuals must meet after the chosen sport has ended. Once deadlines pass, staff from Special Olympics Minnesota interview applicants. Final selection is done through a random drawing

for each sport from athletes or teams who applied and meet the qualifications.

The year leading into the Games, athletes commit to a training program outlined by coaches. They must train locally in the sport and attend the state competition for which they have been chosen.

The 2025 Special Olympics USA Games logo is a celebration of inclusivity, togetherness, and the soul of Minnesota. The top of the design shows the spirit of USA Games with the lower half celebrating Minnesota and surrounding the Special Olympics symbol. The logo designed by the award-winning company Droga5, part of Accenture Song, started the process by working alongside 30 Special Olympics Minnesota athletes and coaches. The design team continued working with the Athlete Advisory Council made up of Minnesota athletes to identify 12 specific elements connecting Special Olympics and Minnesota.

Continued on page 2

MISSION

St. Croix Trail Blazers' missions are to provide horseback riding, training, and competitive sports opportunities to individuals with special needs in a safe, learning environment through the adaptive equine experience and provide therapeutic riding and activities for active duty or veteran military personnel to enhance their physical, emotional, and social well-being.

In This Issue

Special Olympics.....page 1	Sunflower Lanyard?Page 6
Give to the Maxpage 2	Riders in the Spotlightpage 7
Common Questionspage 3	Our Email Addressespage 8
First Annual St. Croix Trail Blazers Golf Scramble Fundraiserpage 4	\$50 Off Your Riding Feepage 8
	Reminderpage 8

The elements incorporated into the final design are “Inclusive, Inspiring, Bravery, Respect, Joy, Community, Welcoming, Bridges, Trees, Lakes, Stars, and Torch.”

The “Circle of Inclusion” is made up of ten sentiments, each having their own story. The stories form the foundation of the logo symbolizing unity and diversity in Special Olympics. Symbols connect directly to athlete experience while others celebrate Minnesota. Below are the stories as described by Droga5 and the Athlete Advisory Council.

1. **Bridge:** As a common sight across our host state with many rivers, bridges connect people and are a testament to forging lifelong connections and traversing adversity together.
2. **Water:** Water is our Minnesota-rooted element, something the Land of 10,000 Lakes knows a thing or two about. It’s both a nod to Minnesota’s natural beauty and to all the water sports that we enjoy here.
3. **Trees:** The state’s towering forests stand tall, supporting our athletes, as well as serving as a fitting landscape and perfect backdrop for the many outdoor sports being held at the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games.
4. **People:** People are the heart and soul of Special Olympics! Through inclusive competition, the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games brings together thousands of people from all over the country to celebrate unity and lift up athletes.
5. **Athlete:** To be a Special Olympics athlete is to rise above limitations and challenge misconceptions about those with intellectual disabilities.

We celebrate their strength and determination and their participation in the USA Games.

6. **Hearts:** The athletes, coaches, and volunteers of Special Olympics lead with their hearts; it is at the core of everything they do. Hearts are meant to represent that essential spirit, as well as the idea of being joyful and welcoming.
7. **Torch:** The torch, celebrating themes of courage and diversity, represents the vigor and fiery passion of the athletes striving to achieve their fullest potential.
8. **Stars:** It is only fitting that stars – symbols of excellence and achievement – be used when 4,000 athletes convene in the North Star State for the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games, each athlete shining brightly as they shoot for the stars!
9. **Flame:** The tradition of the single flame, symbolizing hope, ignites communities around the country to unite around shared passion, courage, and diversity during the Special Olympics USA Games.
8. **Special Olympics Logo:** At the center are five figures in a unifying circle, representing the iconic and global Special Olympics brand.

To stay up-to-date on the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games or to get involved, please visit www.2026usagames.org and follow the organization on Instagram ([@specialolympicsusagames](https://www.instagram.com/specialolympicsusagames)), Facebook ([SpecialOlympicsUSAGames](https://www.facebook.com/SpecialOlympicsUSAGames)), Twitter ([@2026USAGames](https://twitter.com/@2026USAGames)) and LinkedIn ([2026 Special Olympics USA Games](https://www.linkedin.com/company/2026SpecialOlympicsUSAGames)).

Karen Harjes

Give to the Max



Give to the Max 25 is November 20, 2025.

However, early giving has started.

Why is Give to the Max important? St. Croix Trail Blazers partially relies on donations to help keep our horse partners well cared for, provide trained staff, and keep our facility well-maintained. St. Croix Trail Blazers matters to many because...

Continued on page 3

The relationship a rider forms with a horse and staff helps:

- Overcome sensory issues.
- Improves self-esteem.
- Offers a sense of freedom and accomplishment.
- Promotes positive outlook.
- Increases concentration and discipline.
- Strengthens fine and gross motor skills.
- Enhances social skills and communication.
- Builds patience.
- Encourages responsibility.

A horse's gait moves a rider's body, which mimics the human walk. The rhythm and rocking gait of the horse transfers the movement to the rider that:

- Relaxes muscles.
- Improves muscle tone and posture.
- Helps with flexibility.
- Improves eye/hand coordination.
- Reduces stress.
- Improves balance.
- Enhances spatial awareness – knowing where you are in relation to objects or people and how to move around them (big for riding but also in everyday things like walking, riding a bike, sports, etc.)
- Increases attention span and problem-solving skills.
- Increases communication.

Riding provides sensory and motor input for:

- Vestibular – coordination and balance.

- Proprioceptive – body awareness – balancing on one leg, adjusting your balance on an uneven surface, knowing your feet are touching grass or concrete without looking.
- Tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory senses – touch, see, hear, smell.

We appreciate any donation you can make. Every little bit helps!

Donations can be:

- Put in the payment box in the lounge.
- Mailed to us at 6659 Jasmine Court North, Stillwater, MN 55082 OR
- Paid on the Give to the Max website: www.givemn.org/search?kw=St.%20Croix%20Trail%20Blazers.

Please also think of us if your employer does donation matching. We're happy to provide what information you may need for a matching donation.

Each donation made during Give to the Max enters us to win extra money. If Give to the Max randomly draws your gift, we will receive an additional prize grant! There are 20 Early Giving Golden Tickets for \$500 each every day until November 20. On November 20, every 15 minutes a Golden Ticket will be drawn for \$500 each, hourly \$1,000 Golden Tickets, and a \$10,000 Super-Sized Golden Ticket.

Help us reach our goal of \$5,000. Thank you for your support.

Common Questions

We frequently have discussions with families or riders regarding trouble getting a horse to trot or not liking a horse and wanting to ride a different one. With the trotting, it's usually the rider working on balance and learning the skills of what needs to happen to get the horse to trot. With regards to choosing horses, as you are told when you start your lessons, riders will not choose their horse. It comes down to the rider's skill level and the horse's personality. These questions were recently answered in another newsletter, and we felt they were noteworthy of sharing.

Q. Why are some horses so hard to get to trot?

A: As with some people, some horses are not overly ambitious. However, what they lack in ambition can keep a rider safe. The beginner-level horses are chosen according to their age and temperament. If a horse does anything too fast, a new rider's balance could be compromised. When learning how to ride, a rider must develop a sense of confidence. If a horse moves or trots

too fast, a rider can lack confidence and experience a sense of being in danger. When a rider lacks confidence and becomes scared, they stop learning.

Also, if a rider is off balance by leaning too far forward or is leaning to one side, an older, more experienced horse will feel this and knows the result will be a rider who could fall off. Riding is also learning to control an 1100-pound animal.

A rider will learn to be more determined if they have to work hard to get a horse to trot. If they constantly worry about a horse going too fast, they will most likely become scared and not want to continue.

Q: My child really does not like riding that horse. Why do they have to ride her/him again?

A: In everyday life, people will have to deal with someone that they really don't care for. Learning how to deal with those times can start with horses. Horses can teach a very valuable lesson in finding out what it takes to accomplish something.

Don't take the easy way out and say, "You don't get it, I quit trying." Look to yourself and see what needs to be done to handle the situation or personality you are faced with. Some riders have made the mistake of saying, "I hate..." This usually leads to countless lessons on the same horse only to end up learning a very valuable lesson from that horse.

Ninety percent of the time, the hated horse ends up being a favorite horse once the lesson is learned. If every horse was the same and did nothing wrong, no lessons would be learned. Riders who dislike a particular horse should work to understand and improve on that horse instead of looking for the easy way out and simply not ride them again.

In the same way, some riders also ride the same horse if that horse is particularly good at working on a weakness. Thankfully they are all different. The end result is a more rounded, more prepared, better trained rider.

In the end, it all comes down to safety first and teaching a rider good horsemanship skills.

First Annual St. Croix Trail Blazers Golf Scramble Fundraiser

On September 25, we hosted our first golf scramble at Oak March Golf Course. The weather was beautiful

for 18 holes of golf along some challenging fun games and a delicious lunch.



Thank you to all our participants. We were pleased with the turnout and the funds raised.

Congratulations to our winners:

Luke Havermann, Matt McKenzie, Matt Ribar, and Marco Vincent.

A special thanks goes to our sponsors:

First State Bank and Trust, LeClair, Q Solutions, and St. Croix Valley Cabinetry.

Planning has already begun for next year. Hope to see you then!



Have You Encountered a Sunflower Lanyard?

A U.K.-based organization called The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program launched in 2016 at Gatwick Airport in England. The program is now recognized in more than 300 airports and has expanded to rail stations, sports venues, retail centers, universities, and theme parks around the world. The sunflower has become a symbol for people with disabilities that may not be overtly apparent to others. It serves as a discrete way to indicate that a person wearing it may need additional support, understanding, or extra time.

If you have cared for someone or have personally experienced functional limitations such as impaired mobility or low vision, you know how challenging it can be to navigate many public places. People who are neurodivergent may find many public places overstimulating and anxiety-inducing. Similarly, for many who experience mental illness, it can be difficult to actively participate in public spaces. There are assistive technologies and equipment that individuals can utilize, but organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of making public places more welcoming and accessible.

You may have noticed some of these efforts — enhanced lighting, sensory rooms, acoustic paneling, access

to adult changing tables, and improved signage,

to name a few. Many of these changes are simple and easy to miss for the casual observer but could be life-changing for a person with a disability. While many challenges can be addressed through environmental modifications, some people may need physical assistance or reassurance from others. There are many barriers that people face as they attempt to find and maintain employment, participate in civic life, or simply leave their homes. In turn, this can inhibit meaningful connections and often exacerbates feelings of isolation and mental health issues.

Through the Hidden Disability Sunflower initiative, a person who wishes to identify as a person with a disability can obtain a lanyard, wristband, or other wearable items. They also have the option to get a personalized card with details about the support they need.

If you, or someone you love has an invisible disability, you can learn more about this initiative at HDSunflower.com/us.



Our Email Addresses

You can reach these people
at their email addresses:

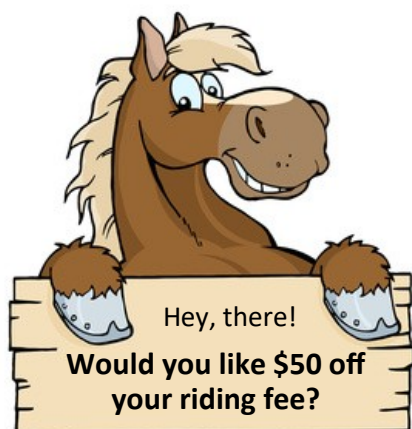
Karen H.: karen@stcroixtrailblazers.org

Kellie: kellie@stcroixtrailblazers.org

Karen M.: treasurer@stcroixtrailblazers.org



Please remember
to check your spam
or junk folder for
any updates from
St. Croix Trail Blazers.



If you bring a new rider who joins
the team, we'll give you \$50 off
your next month's fee!

***Rider must pass evaluation
with instructor.***



Special People Needing Special Horses

Contact Us



Email:
karen@stcroixtrailblazers.org

Website:
www.stcroixtrailblazers.org

Facebook:
[St. Croix Trail Blazers](https://www.facebook.com/St.CroixTrailBlazers)

6659 Jasmine Court North, Stillwater, MN 55082

Copywriters: Sylvia Grubb and Karen Harjes
Layout: Kristie Campeau-Perlock
Send submissions to: hsgrubb@gmail.com

St. Croix Trail Blazers is tax-exempt under
Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service.

Board of Directors

- Karen Harjes, President/Executive Director
- Vacant, Vice President
- Karen Malmskog, Treasurer
- Ali Evans, Secretary
- Kellie Grayden, Program Director/Board Advisor
- Colette Morris, Legal Counsel/Board Advisor
- Spence Morley, Board Advisor

Instructors

- Kellie Grayden, Program Director
- Kjerstin Berg, Instructor
- Ellyn Thompson, Instructor
- Laura Ernst, Instructor
- Kaylee Miskovitch, Instructor