



THE PRIVILEGE OF VOLUNTEERING AT THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD SUMMER GAMES

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When someone asks you to donate your time or resources for a cause, we all have the tendency to pause. Sometimes we ask ourselves, “What am I willing to give up? How will it fit into my already hectic schedule? Are my finances strong enough to withstand this donation?”

But for one cause, I never hesitate. Special Olympics turned my volunteering into a privilege I immensely cherish. In October, I

volunteered for the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China. This was my sixth World Games event. In 1991, I helped for the first time at the International Games in Minneapolis, Minn. I was on the Games Organizing Staff for the 1999 Special Olympics World Summer Games held here in North Carolina.

In 2001, I joined a specialized team of volunteers who assist with media coverage of the Games, crisis communications, crowd control, celebrity escorting and a multitude of other “as needed duties.” As a member of that team, I also experienced the World Games in Anchorage, Alaska; Dublin, Ireland; and Nagano, Japan.

In Shanghai, nearly 7,500 athletes came from more than 160 countries to participate in the world-class competition. State Personnel Director Thomas Wright’s niece, 25-year-old Kathryn Frye of Greenville, competed on Team USA in Roller Skating. During the Games, I interrupted lunch between and her teammates. But she was thrilled when I told her I brought her uncle’s good wishes and wanted to take her picture. Kathryn placed fourth in her three races: 100M, 300M, and 500M. She began roller skating when she was 10, and has participated on the state level with Special Olympics for five years. In November, she took part in the 2007 Special Olympics Fall Games in High Point.

Visiting far-away places is exhilarating and sometimes challenging, but for me, the greatest rewards of Special Olympics are meeting athletes like Kathryn. I rejoice in their triumphs



Jill Hammergren at the closing ceremony of the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China.



Kathryn Frye of Greenville, a member of Team USA in Roller Skating.

over amazing struggles that allow them opportunities to compete at the World Games. I celebrate with parents who are overjoyed at their sons’ and daughters’ accomplishments. I relish the coaches who devote their skills and time training these athletes. I am awestruck by the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who make these World Games possible. I am thankful for the corporate sponsors who help underwrite the Games.

But mostly, I am deeply grateful for the privilege to contribute to such a wonderful movement.