



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 2, 2018

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

**MAYOR EMANUEL, SPECIAL OLYMPICS AND THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT BREAK GROUND
ON *ETERNAL FLAME OF HOPE* TO CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR**

The permanent monument, which conveys the hope for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, will be located outside of Soldier Field –recognized as the birthplace of Special Olympics

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today joined Special Olympics officials and the Chicago Park District at a groundbreaking ceremony held for the *Eternal Flame of Hope* – a permanent, 30-foot monument for Special Olympics at Soldier Field, the site of the first games 50 years ago. The *Eternal Flame of Hope* will be located on Soldier Field's North Lawn, off of McFetridge Drive.

"The *Eternal Flame of Hope* not only celebrates Chicago as the birthplace of the Special Olympics, it is a testament to the depth and talent of athletes who compete at the highest level every year," said Mayor Emanuel. "The Special Olympics will always have a home in Chicago, and we are proud to support the participating athletes who showcase to the world what it means to be an Olympian."

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Chicago Park District Superintendent Mike Kelly, Special Olympics International CEO Mary Davis, Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke and four Special Olympics athletes who participated in the first games in 1968 attended this afternoon's ceremony to celebrate the monument as a symbol of inclusion.

"The Chicago Park District is proud to have played a part in the founding of Special Olympics and to carry on the great legacy through the inclusive programming we run for children and adults with intellectual disabilities at more than 21 park locations across the city," Chicago Park District Superintendent Mike Kelly said. "This monument will serve as a reminder of that first event and serve as a beacon symbolizing the potential of every individual for greatness."

On July 20, 1968, nearly 1,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from 26 states and Canada came together at Soldier Field for the first ever International Special Olympics Games. The event was a significant moment in a worldwide civil-rights movement for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

"The Special Olympics Flame of Hope, a symbol which is a part of Special Olympics Games, has always been a beacon lighting the way for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities," Special Olympics International CEO Mary Davis said. "The *Eternal Flame of Hope* monument will be a constant reminder that when in doubt, choose to include. The monument symbolizes the eternal

hope that Special Olympics provides to athletes and their families, and in turn, the eternal hope that Special Olympics athletes provide to the world.”

The idea for Special Olympics came from then 23-year-old Anne McGlone Burke, a Chicago Park District instructor who in 1967 was running a program for children with intellectual disabilities at West Pullman Park. She presented the idea of a citywide track meet to Eunice Kennedy Shriver and the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation and City of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley. It was the combined resources and commitments of the Kennedy Foundation, Daley and others that led to those first games.

“No matter your title or your job, whether you were a pipe fitter, a lifeguard, a teacher or a volunteer, the first International Special Olympics Games brought everyone together in a citywide effort. The first games created a contagious affection for these children and adults. Instead of being shut away, individuals with intellectual disabilities were finally seen for what they were and are – people with hopes, dreams and enormous potential,” Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke said.

This summer, July 17-21, Chicago will again host athletes from around the world for a 50th anniversary celebration. On July 20, law enforcement officers from across the region will run alongside Special Olympics athletes in the Law Enforcement Torch Run. This 4-mile run will take place on the lakefront bike path and will conclude with the lighting of the Eternal Flame of Hope.

“As the host of the inaugural Special Olympics, Chicago gave athletes from around the world the opportunity to showcase their athleticism and accomplishments,” said Karen Tamley, Commissioner for the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities. “Now fifty years later, the Eternal Flame will be a reminder that the Special Olympics has illuminated the lives of more than four and a half million athletes in over 170 countries, and will continue to do so in the years to come.”

The Eternal Flame of Hope was designed by Richard Hunt, Chicago-born artist with more than 125 public sculptures commissioned across the country. His work can be found in numerous museums and private collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Gallery and National Museum of Art in DC and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 2014, Hunt was among the first recipients of the Fifth Star Awards, honoring Chicago artists whose careers have most deeply impacted the cultural life of the city. His most famous pieces include “Jacob’s Ladder” at the Carter G Woodson Library, “Freedom” on the exterior façade of the State of Illinois Building, “Flight Forms” at Midway Airport, “We Will” at the Heritage Building on the corner of Randolph and Garland Court, and the soon-to-be permanent installation of The Eternal Flame at Soldier Field.

“The Eternal Flame of Hope will provide great joy and pride to all who visit and reflect on the past, present and future of Special Olympics,” Special Olympics Chicago President Kevin Magnuson said. “We are extremely grateful to the Chicago Park District and the City of Chicago for supporting this spectacular project celebrating Special Olympics 50th Anniversary in the exact place where it all began on July 20, 1968.”

Today, Special Olympics is a global inclusion movement that reaches 5 million athletes in 172 countries using sport, health, education and leadership programs every day around the world to empower people with intellectual disabilities.

“Special Olympics Illinois is thrilled that Chicago will be home to the 50th Anniversary celebration for Special Olympics,” Special Olympics Illinois President and CEO Dave Breen said. “We look forward to celebrating the past, present and future of the movement in our home state – one that served as the birthplace of Special Olympics. As we embark on the next 50 years, the Eternal Flame of Hope monument will serve as a great and powerful reminder to live and play inclusively.”

Many other events will also be taking place July 17-21. The Special Olympics Unified Cup competition at Toyota Park will include a total of 24 international soccer teams made up of athletes with and without intellectual disabilities. July 21 will represent a Global Day of Inclusion at Soldier Field, with sports activities, interactive games, exhibits, delicious food offerings and live entertainment. The week of celebrations will come to a close with a star-studded evening of inspiring entertainment at Huntington Bank Pavilion at Northerly Island. More information about the week’s festivities can be found at www.specialolympics50.org.

###