

SUNY Optometry Faculty & Students Volunteer at Special Olympics

Queens, N.Y - On Saturday, June 4, 2011, 63 students and 5 faculty members from SUNY College of Optometry volunteered their time at the Special Olympics Metro Tournament held at Queens College in Flushing, New York. The Special Olympics is an international year-round sports training and athletic competition open to children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them the opportunity to demonstrate courage, improve physical fitness and develop new relationships.

Since 2001, the SUNY Optometry volunteer group has been organized by Dr. Joan Portello, Associate Professor of Clinical Sciences and the Director of the Special Olympics Lions Club International (LCI) Opening Eyes program. As part of the program, SUNY students and faculty provide free comprehensive vision screenings and eye exams to event participants. The students also manufacture corrective eyeglasses and protective eyewear on-site and distribute them at no cost. At the completion of their screening, athletes receive a detailed certificate describing their vision needs as well as follow-up referrals to their local health care providers.



(SUNY Faculty L-R) Primary Care resident Dr. Andrea Antonelli, Medical Technician Boris Levin, Dr. Joan Portello and Dr. Julie Appel.

“I find it extremely rewarding to supervise our SUNY students in delivering eye care to this special needs population. Not only are the students gaining a wonderful experience working with the tournament participants, but to see the athletes faces light up with joy when they go through the vision screening is truly priceless!” said Dr. Portello.

In addition to providing screenings, the SUNY Optometry volunteers assisted with registration and enthusiastically cheered on athletes from the sidelines.

Funded by a generous donation from the Lions Clubs International Foundation, screenings are offered at select Special Olympics events worldwide through the Healthy Athletes Opening Eyes program. Worldwide suppliers and global sponsors also include the Sàfilo, Santinelli and Essilor International.