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**Press Release****For Immediate Release**

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**Change Coming to Shelby County Special Olympics**

For more than 30 years, Shelby County Special Olympics provided more than athletic events for individuals with disabilities. It provided opportunities for exercise and social time with friends, family, and a beloved leader named Mark Harrod. In the coming years, the organization will see one major change. There will still be fun, games, sports, families and friends. However, Mark Harrod will step down as the Local Coordinator and pass leadership to the Shelby County Board of Developmental Disabilities (SCBDD).

Mark began volunteering with Special Olympics in 1986. At that time, there were less than 50 athletes participating in the program. With fewer regulations, activities were more like pick-up games. They organized track and field days and pee-wee baseball games. By the early 2000's, Coordinators Mike and Julie Barhorst were ready to pass the torch. Mark stepped up, promising to only be in charge for 2 years.

Now, almost 20 years later, Mark is ready for someone else to take over. Even though it is time to make some life changes, he did not want Special Olympics to get left behind. The current SCBDD staff was already working closely with Mark and Special Olympics. He knew he could trust leadership at SCBDD to take Special Olympics to the next level. "The environment was just perfect with [Superintendent] Leigh Anne [Wenning]. We've been working on this [transition] gradually for a couple years."

As Local Coordinator, Mark built relationships with families, groups, and organizations who were as passionate about Special Olympics as himself. Because of their generosity, he rarely held fundraisers for the athletes. "The community's been especially well... We've been the beneficiary of a lot of poker runs... I've not had to ask for everything. I've had people come out of nowhere and say, 'We had a garage sale at home and the kids want to give the money to Special Olympics.'"

With SCBDD taking over, Mark feels confident that athletes will still see the benefits of a giving community. "Obviously with you guys, you have the capability of communicating with the community and keeping up with the way it's supposed to be." With that kind of support, Mark also believes SCBDD will be able to maintain, and possibly expand, the activities available to the athletes.

SCBDD started preparing for Special Olympics last summer by installing a softball diamond on the hill. Mark says he is excited about the addition of the softball diamond. When this year's softball season starts, he plans to watch the games as a spectator and cheer on the athletes. He still hopes to spend time with the athletes and their families because, after all, they are like his own family.

When asked if he had any advice for the county board, Mark said, "One thing that we always made sure was we always got the best quality shirts we could get." At any given moment, Special Olympic athletes can be found proudly wearing their shirts all over Shelby County and sharing their favorite Special Olympic memories. This is a true testament to his work and success in building the program.

SCBDD thanks Mark Harrod for his dedication to Shelby County Special Olympics and hopes to continue the growth he started. Public inquiries about Shelby County Special Olympics can now be directed to Jessica Guillozet, SCBDD Community Connections Facilitator, at [jguillozet@shelbydd.org](mailto:jguillozet@shelbydd.org) or 937-658-6825. Postal mail for Shelby County Special Olympics also can be mailed to Jessica Guillozet at 1200 S Children's Home Rd, Sidney. Updates for the athletes will continue to be posted on the Shelby County Special Olympics Facebook page (@ShelbyCoSpecialOlympics).

***\*\*Include attached photo\*\****

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