

FRISCO

Volunteer, teams have hearts of gold

Frisco: Special Olympics president finds joy in the spirit of athletes

By **BRIDGET BARRY**
Special Contributor

For Tony Deyoe, president of the Frisco Flyers Special Olympics, the jubilant smiles of accomplishment on the faces of team participants are the only thanks he needs for his time and effort.

Mr. Deyoe, a production control analyst for Bank of America, gives unselfishly of his time every week to the nonprofit group.

"The smiles on their faces is the reward. The spirit inside them is fulfilling to me. It's just precious, a feeling of joy in my heart," he said.

"Many people take a lot for granted and don't realize how hard these folks struggle to get out and learn something new. The organization gives the youth an uplifting feeling and sense that there are others out there that really care."

As one of 10 children, Mr. Deyoe had a younger brother he took to Special Olympics activities in another state. Eventually, Mr. Deyoe became certified to coach bowling, basketball and track and field events for the group. Upon moving to Frisco, he got involved with the newly formed Special Olympics group, first serving as the volunteer coordinator and currently as the president in addition to coaching



From left: Alma Hale, Hunter Harn, Erika Kopecky, Brittney Farmer, Jayme Brooks, Heather Collins and Michael Bramer of the Frisco Flyers basketball team competed in Allen last year. Frisco Special Olympics offers basketball, track and field, bowling, swimming and golf for residents with special needs and their families. The group has grown to about 70 athletes from Frisco, Little Elm, McKinney and Prosper.

events.

Frisco Special Olympics was established in May 2001 with the vision of creating an exemplary local Special Olympics team for Frisco and surrounding communities by honoring the dreams and human spirit of athletes. Frisco's chapter has grown to about 70 athletes ranging in age from 6 to 28.

Sports offered include basketball, track and field, bowling, swimming and golf. The organization offers year-round activities and is open to youths in Frisco, Little Elm, McKinney and Prosper. The Frisco group competes against teams in nearby suburbs.

Julie Tollefson, a Frisco mother, has a son with Down syndrome and autism. She learned

about the formation of the Special Olympics group and attended a meeting in 2002. Since then, her son, Sean, has participated in track and field, swimming and bowling events. Mrs. Tollefson has served on the board as the parent coordinator.

"It's been wonderful for Sean. His first competition was track and field when he was 8," she

said. "He's always been a runner, but he finally had an outlet for his running. Seeing him standing on the winner's platform getting an award for doing a constructive activity gives us such joy."

The group provides support and encouragement not only for the participants, but for their families as well. Siblings are allowed to participate alongside the Special Olympics athlete in the role of a "unified partner." Parties, picnics and attendance at major sporting events give parents a chance to talk to others who are coping with the same circumstances.

Frisco Flyers is always in need of volunteers to help coach the events.

According to Mr. Deyoe, coaches only commit to a couple hours a week during the season their sport runs. Training to become a certified coach involves a one-day class and some additional follow-up.

The group's track and field practice began Wednesday. The season runs through May.

A fundraising golf tournament is scheduled for June 26 at the Tribute golf course in The Colony. Fundraisers help defray all costs for the athletes.

For more information on activities and fundraisers, visit www.friscospecialolympics.org.

Bridget Barry is a Carrollton-based freelance writer.