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Special Olympians enjoy Safari at SOFF '05 *Annual festival delights Olympians and volunteers*

MATTOON, Ill. – More than 1,000 Special Olympians from East Central Illinois were treated to a day of fun and games on Saturday, Sept. 17, as Consolidated Communications hosted its 22nd annual Special Olympics Family Festival in Mattoon.

At the beginning of the day, Special Olympians were paired with a “Friend-For-A-Day,” a volunteer who escorted their Olympian through the “tent city” housing games and activities. In addition to the many non-competitive games, hay rides, a dunk tank, mechanical bull rides and a petting zoo delighted the attendees.

Colorful cartoon characters highlighted the parade and posed for pictures with Olympians throughout the day. In keeping with this year’s Safari theme, many volunteers dressed in colorful outfits and wore animal prints.

This year’s special guest actor and musician Chris Burke recited the Special Olympics Oath and entertained the crowd with his bandmates Joe and John DeMasi. Chris played “Corky Thatcher” on ABC’s Life Goes On series.

Each Olympian left the event with a SOFF 2005 medal, along with some special memories. “The Olympians and our volunteers alike took home memories that will last a lifetime,” said Tiffany Sullivan, 2005 SOFF chairperson.

SOFF began in 1984 as an effort by Consolidated Communications to develop a special community program to involve its employees. Today, the event requires more than 1,500 volunteers to make the day a success. While the majority of volunteers are employees of Consolidated Communications, hundreds of volunteers from Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College, area high schools, civic groups, businesses and individual members of the surrounding communities support the event each year.