

September 22, 2003

More than 950 Special Olympians enjoy day at annual festival
Consolidated Communications hosts 20th annual Special Olympics Family Festival

MATTOON – More than 950 Special Olympians from East Central Illinois were treated to a day of fun and games on Saturday, Sept. 20, as Consolidated Communications hosted its 20th annual Special Olympics Family Festival on the grounds of Lake Land College in Mattoon.

Committee members chose a Hawaiian theme for the event and selected 3 News Meteorologist Robert Reese to serve as the SOFF Special Guest. Reese began the day by participating in the event's Opening Ceremony and recited the Special Olympics oath with those participating. During the remainder of the day Reese greeted Olympians and signed autographs.

Special Olympians Brooke Ingram, Joey Dickerson and Katie Cunningham participated in the traditional torch run and lit the Special Olympics flame.

At the beginning of the day, Special Olympians were paired with a "Friend-For-A-Day," a volunteer who escorts their Olympian through the "tent city" housing games and activities. In addition to the many non-competitive games, camel rides, 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 theme, many volunteers dressed in colorful outfits and wore Hawaiian leis.

Each Olympian left the event with a SOFF 2003 medal, along with some special memories. "The Olympians and our volunteers alike took home memories that will last a lifetime," said Kathy Andrews, a Consolidated Communications employee who serves as the 2003 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 2,000 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.

Consolidated Communications employees, other volunteers and especially the Special Olympians are already looking forward to next years celebration on Saturday, Sept. 18, 2004.