

Pulling Together for Special Olympics

July 8, 2006

Written by: Dan Whetzel
Photography by: Lance C. Bell, PPA



Pictured above: Dottie Turner, Special Olympics Area Director; Dick Pfefferkorn, Executive Director Canal Place; Donna Corley, WMSR Representative; Carol Clulee, Train Pull Board of Directors; Tim Deal, Train Pull Board of Directors; Kim Shirer, Train Pull Board of Directors; David Goad, Sheriff, Founder of Train Pull; Jimmy Bone, Train Pull Chairman/Coordinator; Dan Lasher, Train Pull Board of Directors; and Dave Morgan, Train Pull Board of Directors.



The Allegany County Sheriff's Office is anticipating the 6th Annual Western Maryland Train Pull that benefits local Special Olympics athletes. What began in 2001 as a modest five team event grew into an 18 team event in 2005, and this year's competition promises to be even more exciting.

The Train Pull began when Allegany County Sheriff David Goad realized the need for funding Special Olympics programs and athletes in Allegany County. Special Olympics programs do not receive federal or state funds to operate, so they must rely on the generosity of community members to continue. Over 170 local athletes were depending on funding for local, state, and national competitions, yet funds were insufficient to meet their needs because the program runs year round and includes 10 sports where qualifiers may advance to higher levels of competition. Dottie Thomas, Area Director for Special Olympics, stated their main expenses involve increasing transportation costs, uniforms, and rental fees for skiing equipment.

Sheriff Goad and other organizers learned that various fund raisers were being conducted throughout Maryland, including one at Baltimore's BWI Airport where participants pulled a jet aircraft. The BWI event sparked Sheriff Goad's interest in a pulling competition. He then decided,

"If they can pull a plane, we can pull a train." Starting with the train pull concept, an event was organized around Mountain Thunder, the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad's 250 ton, steam locomotive that normally serves as motive power for passenger trains to Frostburg, Maryland. The train pulling event is appropriate for Allegany County's rail heritage as it is the location of the first rolled iron rail in the United States and a center for current CSX operations.

According to the contest rules, twenty participants are assigned to each team. While some teams are composed exclusively of employees from local businesses, one need not be sponsored by a particular corporation. According to event coordinator Jim Bone, "Individuals can pay the fee, receive an event T-shirt, and be assigned to a team." When competition begins, each team member grasps a single tugboat rope that is tied to Mountain Thunder. When the signal to begin is sounded, participants try to pull the Baldwin steam locomotive a distance of 12 feet, in the fastest possible time. Enthusiastic spectators cheer their favorite teams as the locomotive creaks and groans forward toward the finish line. Most importantly, all funds collected as a result of the competitor's efforts are directed to Special Olympics programs in Allegany County.

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Wintertime in Oakland, Md., © Charles Amos 2004

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The Train Pull has created spirited competition and impressive records. In 2005, the Keyser Area Gym Team set a record of 13.3 seconds while the best women's time of 32.7 seconds was recorded by the Girl's Power Team.

This 2006 event promises to be even larger and more exciting as planners are reporting an increase in the number of organizations and individuals who are signing up for the friendly competition. The Train Pull is scheduled for **July 8, 2006**, at the Western Maryland Railway Station, located at Canal Place in Cumberland, Maryland. While participants enjoy the Train Pull event, they may also visit a variety of activities and events held in conjunction with Canal Fest/RailFest that will also be held that weekend in July.

Organizations and individuals interested in participating or sponsoring opportunities should contact Jim Bone at 301-268-2319.



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