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SPECIAL ATHLETES HONORED WITH SPECIAL OLYMPICS POSTAGE STAMP

WASHINGTON — Next month the United States Postal Service issues a new commemorative postage stamp honoring the competitors, coaches and volunteers whose joy and dedication to the Special Olympics have changed the world.

The Special Olympics postage stamp will be issued at a 10:30 a.m. first day ceremony on Feb. 13 at the Chicago (Ill.) Main Post Office, 433 West Harrison Street.

“The Postal Service has a long tradition of issuing stamps that support and encourage social awareness issues,” said John F. Walsh, vice chairman of the presidentially appointed Postal Service Board of Governors, who will dedicate the stamp. “It is our hope that the Special Olympics stamp will help highlight this wonderful organization and bring to the attention of all Americans the special courage and tenacity that is the hallmark of these exceptional athletes.”

“We are grateful to the Postal Service for honoring Special Olympics athletes worldwide, who every day ask us all to focus on the important gifts in life, including the chance to be part of a world where everyone has an opportunity to be a champion,” said Timothy Shriver, President and CEO of Special Olympics.

The 80-cent International rate Special Olympics stamp, which can be used to send letters to countries around the world, features a computer-generated design by Lance Hidy of Merrimac, Mass. It captures the enthusiastic and communal spirit of Special Olympics. The design depicts an athlete wearing a medal celebrating by grasping the hands of his fellow competitors and raising their hands high in the air. The Special Olympics logo is depicted above the athlete’s head.

Founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968, Special Olympics offers year-round sports training and athletic competition that empowers individuals of all ages with the strength and self-confidence to succeed in sports and in life. From the age of eight, people with mental



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retardation can join a Special Olympics Program and train and compete in a variety of summer and winter Olympic-type sports. Today more than 1 million people worldwide take part in Special Olympics events year-round.

At each level of competition, Special Olympics athletes are grouped according to ability so that everyone has the chance to win, and winners of local events also may have the opportunity to compete.

Many will also participate in the World Games, an international event that is held every two years, alternating between summer and winter sports. Winning is less important than having the opportunity to participate in sports and reaching to achieve one's personal best. Taken by each athlete before competition, the Special Olympics Athlete Oath evokes the enthusiastic determination that makes every participant a champion: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

Held in Chicago in 1968, the first Special Olympics World Games featured 1,000 athletes from the United States and Canada who competed in swimming and track & field. Nearly 35 years later, more than 7,000 athletes and volunteer coaches from 150 countries will travel to Dublin, Ireland, to take part in the first Special Olympics World Summer Games held outside the United States. The event is expected to be the largest sporting event of any kind in the world this year. A projected 500,000 spectators will attend the 10-day event, which will feature competitions in aquatics, athletics (track & field), badminton, basketball, bocce, bowling, cycling equestrian, football (soccer), golf, gymnastics, powerlifting, roller-skating, sailing, table tennis, tennis, team handball and volleyball. In addition, kayaking, pitch and putt, and judo will be offered as demonstration sports.

The next Special Olympics World Winter Games will take place in Nagano, Japan, in 2005. They will be followed by the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China.

Since the mid-1950s, the Postal Service has issued stamps that highlight social awareness issues. Recent examples include the Diabetes Awareness, Mentoring a Child, Adoption Awareness and Organ and Tissue Donation stamps.

Current U.S. stamps and philatelic products, as well as the free USA Philatelic catalog, are available by calling toll free 1 800 STAMP 24. A selection of U.S. stamps and gift items are also available at the Postal Store at www.usps.com/shop. Images of many current, past and future stamp issues can be found in the Stamp Issues section of the Collector's Corner.

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. It is an independent federal agency that visits 137 million homes and businesses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of more than \$65 billion, it is the world's leading provider of mailing and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. The U.S. Postal Service delivers more than 46 percent of the world's mail volume—some 207 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year—and serves 7 million customers each day at its 40,000 retail locations nationwide.