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**NORTH SUBURBAN
YMCA**
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

YMCA Swim Team Builds Confidence and Connections

Flying Turtles Special Olympics Team Develops Skills In and Out of the Water

Northbrook, IL: The North Suburban YMCA prides itself on creating an environment of inclusivity, where individuals of all ages and abilities come together for activities that make their lives healthier and happier. To see this priority in action, look no farther than the Y's thriving Flying Turtles swim team, where young athletes practice and support each other in both traditional and Special Olympics competitive leagues. Under the direction of coaches Tom March and Missy Contri, children in the program are gaining confidence and empathy as well as great swimming skills.

As coincidence would have it, 2018 marks the 50th anniversary for both the Special Olympics movement and the NSYMCA. When the very first Special Olympics teams were competing at Soldier Field in July 1968, residents of Northbrook and the surrounding suburbs were making final plans for a Y community center that would include a first-rate indoor aquatics program as its centerpiece. Generations of families learned lifechanging swimming skills at the Y, where financial assistance funds help make lessons affordable for those in financial need.

The Y launched its Flying Turtles team in 2014 as an opportunity for aquatics students to expand their skills in a competitive league. The introduction of a reorganized Special Olympics program was not far behind, as March identified swimmers with special needs who would benefit from the team experience. Some joined the team for the exercise and the opportunity to gain friends and be part of a true team; others wholeheartedly embraced the excitement of competition. Prior to the start of the Flying Turtles Special Olympics swim team in 2016 there were four swimmers in the program; today there are 36 swimmers on the Special Olympics team with many swimming on the traditional team also.

This summer, 12 Flying Turtles competed in the Special Olympics Illinois State games at Illinois State University, where they brought home 16 medals and experienced the thrill of participating in an event with aquatic teams from throughout the state. The team's participation level continued a steady increase that has taken place each year. To compete in the Illinois State Special Olympics games, an athlete must earn a gold medal at the district competition. In March of 2018, 23 swimmers competed at the district meet held at Lake Forest College, earning 33 medals.

Coach Tom March reflected on the profound impact the state competition had on teammates and their families. "This was the first year at state competition for some of our swimmers. It is amazing to see the

faces of their families showing how proud they are of their children, and the smiles on the swimmers knowing that they are the center of such a great experience.”

Parent Ann Erie comments, “Swimming with the North Suburban YMCA Special Olympics Flying Turtles has been a rewarding and enriching experience for my son, Joseph. Swimming and competing at meets has taught Joseph that he is not always going to win. He has realized that if he wants to win he must push himself, no one else can do it for him. These are lessons that are going to help Joseph reach his fullest potential as an adult.”

Most importantly, the Flying Turtles operate as a single team, whether they compete in regular or Special Olympics leagues. Peer connections unite all the swimmers, embedding lessons of teamwork and understanding that will shape all their lives for the better.

“On our team, the kids are the priority,” explains Coach Missy Contri. “It’s rewarding for us to see swimmers grow in confidence, no matter where they start with their skills. We know that being on a team like this makes a huge difference in how kids see themselves and their possibilities.”

About the [North Suburban YMCA](#)

Celebrating its 50th Anniversary in 2018/19, the North Suburban YMCA provides individuals in Northbrook and 15 surrounding communities with programs and tools that help them become healthier, more connected, and confident, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, income, or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. The NSYMCA focuses on Youth Development, Healthy Living, and Social Responsibility and is a charitable organization, inclusive and welcoming to all in our community. Learn more at [NSYMCA.org](#).



Photo Caption: Members of the NSYMCA Flying Turtles Special Olympics Swim Team celebrate a successful season together.