The ALL-STAR Newsletter

November 2026 | Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities | Issue 77

Jefferson County BDD
250 John Scott Highway
Steubenville, Ohio
43952
www.jcbdd.com

Superintendent
Michael Zinno

JCBDD Board
Melinda Aleksiejczyk
President

Diane Gray
Vice President

Dr. Ed Florak
Secretary

Members
Stephanie Chester
John Hunt
Kristen McGlone
Alyssa Mosti

How Are We Doing?

Take Our Survey and Provide Your Feedback at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QYTSKN7

In This Edition:

**Falling into Autumn: Special Connections Festival Draws Crowd*

**Alycia Clark Becomes Special Olympics Coordinator*

**Amelia Ault Receives Ohio SIBS Award*

**Indian Creek, Edison Vie at Spooky Bowl*

Falling into Autumn

Special Connections Festival Draws Crowd

All ages were drawn to the Bright Promise campus in Steubenville for the Special Connections Fall Festival on Oct. 24.

More than 175 children and adults delighted in a day of inclusive fun with games, treats, and togetherness amid bright sunshine and tranquil autumn temperatures. Costumed kiddos, from superheroes to dinosaurs, were among the mix, celebrating in their own way at the fall festival as they painted pumpkins, completed a maze, made bracelets and keychains, and enjoyed the playground, a candy apple bar, inflatable games, and petting goats. The fifth-annual event was sponsored by Special Connections, a collaboration among the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Crossroads Christian Church, and the Special Needs Parents of the Ohio Valley Support Group Facebook page.



The Special Connections Fall Festival on Oct. 24 offered inclusive fun for everyone, with pumpkin painting, games, treats, goats, resources and more at the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Bright Promise program campus in Steubenville. Organizers said it was possibly their largest gathering to date. More photos on Page 4.

Special Connections member Mindy Aleksiejczyk, coordinator for the online support group and president of the JCBDD board, said the festival was a resounding success.

"I think this was one of our biggest turnouts and everyone I've talked to enjoyed this year's event," she said. "It's been five years that we've been holding activities, and one of the biggest things we were able to do is provide resources in addition to community events. Special Connections purchased inflatable games through donations, and From Heart to Homestead Farm and local programs have been involved."

Organizers have held trunk-or-treat activities in the past but opted to conduct an inclusive festival where anyone and everyone could have some fun. Highlights included goats provided by From Heart to Homestead Farm of Bloomingdale and resource tables with giveaways and information from Hometown Pediatric Solutions, Everwell Community Health, Hancock County Special Olympics, Ohio Valley Down Syndrome Support Group, Special Connections, the Public Library of Steubenville, and Jefferson County.

"We have people from the tri-state area at all of our events, so we invite resources from neighboring states, as well," Aleksiejczyk added. "This was our biggest event yet. It was great to see so many people in our community come out and join us at this festival. There were so many smiling faces, and we received a ton of feedback from people in attendance about what a great time they had."

She said the growth in attendance was a major highlight, and she noticed the group's mission in full effect.

"This was truly a community event. There were people from every part of our community enjoying this event," she continued. "Although we make our events accessible for individuals with disabilities, these events are for the community and inclusive to everyone. To be able to look around and see new faces and people enjoying each other no matter what the difference was the best thing."

Aleksiejczyk said Special Connections officials were grateful for the response and for the continued support.

"Special Connections would like to thank all those in attendance,

(Continued on Page 4 as FALL)

Alycia Clark Becomes Special Olympics Coordinator

Alycia Clark has long been part of the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities in various capacities, but this time she is taking on a new role as Jefferson County Special Olympics Coordinator.

Clark, of Steubenville, said the post holds a special significance for her and she was excited to be part of the program.

"It feels incredibly rewarding and deeply personal. I am thrilled and honored to have the opportunity to step into this role. My heart is fully invested in this organization, and I am so excited to build an inclusive program right here in Jefferson County," she said.

She opted to take the position because of her 11-year-old son, Oliver, who was diagnosed with level 3 nonverbal autism and type 1 diabetes.

"He has always loved participating in sports, but for years our family had to travel to other cities and counties just to find athletic programs that could accommodate his needs. I took on this role to change that narrative. I am on a mission to ensure that local individuals of all ages have a place to play, grow, and compete without the commute."

Clark has been actively helping the disabled community as a dedicated advocate and a member of Special Connections, a local non-profit providing free inclusive seasonal events, parent informational sessions, a young adult peer group, and a caregiver day-retreat. She also serves as a parent representative for the Jefferson



Alycia Clark

County Family and Children First Council's early childhood committee and is on the executive committee for the local Night to Shine event. She said she has some ideas to carry on the Special Olympics program so local individuals get their opportunity to shine in events.

"My No. 1 goal is to significantly grow our local athlete participation and introduce more sports offerings to Jefferson County. I want our athletes to build confidence, learn new skills, and most of all, experience the pure joy and community that sports provide. I also plan to build a welcoming online presence so every eligible family knows we are here, we are active, and we are ready to support them."

She said the program is currently in a major growth phase and officials are actively rebuilding rosters and reaching out to the community to bring in as many new and returning athletes as possible. Clark also plans to expand activities to give individuals more diversity.

"Expanding our sports offerings is a core part of my mission. As we recruit more athletes and certify more volunteer coaches, I hope to add several new sports to our Jefferson County lineup so everyone can find an activity they truly love," Clark added, noting that an open house will be planned to build upon that goal. More details will be available on the Special Olympics Ohio-Jefferson County Facebook page and the public is encouraged to follow the page to stay informed.

She said Special Olympics was vital to the community because it truly brings everyone together.

"Having a local Special Olympics program means everything. It means true inclusion, empowerment, and belonging. It shows our athletes that they are valued and celebrated for their unique abilities," Clark concluded. "We cannot do this alone. We are always looking for athletes, unified partners, volunteer coaches, and community supporters. If you see me out in the community or at events, please feel free to come up, say hi, and chat with me about how you can get involved with our program."

For more information, contact Clark at JeffersonCounty@sooh.org.

Amelia Ault Receives Ohio SIBS Award

Edison High School junior Amelia Ault has been recognized through the Ohio SIBS organization for her support of individuals with disabilities.

Ault, the daughter of Tom and Anna Ault of East Springfield, was honored during the Wild About SIBS Gala in Columbus on Oct. 24 and received the Empowering Young Voices Award for siblings ages 17 or younger who advocate for siblings with disabilities or the broader disability community. Ohio SIBS is the state chapter of the National Sibling Leadership Network and offers free support, events, and recognition program for siblings of people with disabilities. She was nominated by her mother and said she only became aware when she earned the distinction.

"I'm just very honored to be recognized for it," Ault said. "[The award is for] being a sibling to someone with special needs and making a difference in their lives and for others."

She was among nearly 100 people at the



Amelia "Mimi" Ault received the 2026 Empowering Young Voices Award for advocating for her sister, Olivia, and other people with disabilities during the Wild About SIBS Gala in Columbus on Oct. 24.

gala and was lauded for supporting her elder sister, Olivia, who has cognitive and developmental disabilities. At age 14, Ault was inspired to establish the Special Olympics Unified Livestock Show (SOULS), which pairs youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mentors from 4-H and FFA organizations to exhibit animals during a judged show at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds in Smithfield each August.

The event is preceded by a clinic where the special exhibitors learn to care for and connect with animals including horses, lambs, dogs, poultry, pigs, goats, rabbits, and cows and recipients at the livestock show receive banners and ribbons. Exhibitors and mentors have represented Edison, Indian Creek, Buckeye Local, Weir, Brooke, Steubenville, Harrison Central, Jefferson County Joint Vocational School, and homeschooled youth and the livestock show is free and open to the public. Since its inception, SOULS has garnered spon-

(Continued on Page 4 as SIBS)

Indian Creek, Edison Vie at Spooky Bowl

Students from Indian Creek and Edison high schools faced off for another fiendishly fun flag football game during the Fourth Annual Unified Sports Spooky Bowl on Oct. 30.

Unified sports combine general students and pupils with intellectual or developmental disabilities for a friendly rivalry with the goal of celebrating community. Kettlewell Memorial Stadium was the scene of the latest matchup and ICHS won the coin toss that was led by captain Dylan Haines, one of the original members, and Sheriff Fred Abdalla Jr. The Redskins dominated on their home turf, but not without a battle from the Wildcats. The Redskins held a 16-0 lead during the first quarter and widened the gap to 22-6 by halftime, then the Wildcats began to catch up with consistent touchdowns and eventually narrowed the result. Despite a last-second touchdown by Edison seventh-grader Kolt Goddard, Creek cemented the win by a score of 36-24.

Coaches and players for Creek included Franco Barcalow, Lane Speece, Nizair Vick, Jabari White, Parker Heath, Ethan Starr, Bo Paulman, Aiden Speegle, Jacob Saffle, River Adams, Carter Koos, Colton Dawson, Brayden Stewart, Tatum Deem, Paxson Gorby, Peyton Geary, Elijah Painter with Jefferson County Joint Vocational School students Alex Fabian and Misha Amis. Also participating were cheerleaders Baylee Brown, Madelynn Forrester, Evelyn Leech, Chloe Flesher, Madelynn Adams and Haylee Shaffer.

Edison's team included James Grunenwald, Kolt Goddard, Draven Adams, Isaiah Baker, Brennan Butcher, Aaron Wade, Ryan Burke Reed, Kaden Eddy, Jaidyn Carlson, James Bonecutter, and Olivia Ault with Gabe Call as coach.

Organizers said it was a wonderful day and celebrated the fact that everyone was a winner.

"It's almost like God smiles down on us with the weather," said Jefferson County Unified Sports Director Tom Mort. "Even without the weather it's great. You saw all the smiles and how much they cheered each other."

"It's amazing," commented ICHS Unified Sports Coordinator Amber Scott. "When you look at how four years ago, two teams came together to now having the JVS bring a group in for both teams. It's just the way everybody comes together."

She recognized JVS Superintendent Ted Gorman, who attended with his student-athletes; Sheriff Abdalla and his deputies, who also have been staunch supporters; ICHS School Resource Officer and Deputy Matt Morgan for his work with the Unified Sports program; cheerleaders, majorettes, and band members who entertained the crowd; business teacher Kristen Palavis and her students for selling concessions and original Spooky Bowl T-shirts; art teacher Amanda Speece and her pupils for working with Scott's students on signs and banners; and school leaders for their unwavering support.



Indian Creek High School and Edison faced off in inclusive fun during the Fourth Annual Unified Sports Spooky Bowl flag football game on Oct. 30 at Kettlewell Memorial Stadium. Unified sports include blended teams of general students and pupils with developmental and intellectual disabilities in a day of friendly competition and Indian Creek won the game by a score of 36-24. Pictured is Creek's Paxson Gorby making a touchdown to the excitement of his teammates.

> ***"You saw all the smiles and how much they cheered each other."***
>
> **-Tom Mort**
> **Jefferson County Unified Sports Coordinator**

"It's exciting to see the growth in the players from last year to this year and seeing the student body involved. It's evolving. Everybody comes together and it all falls into place."

"It's been fun," said EHS Unified Sports Coordinator Jason Ensinger. "We enjoy coming out and doing this, and we appreciate the hospitality that Indian Creek shows us. The team was super excited. We've practiced and they've been asking about the unified basketball game."

ICHS graduate Kaleb Mannion, last year's co-captain, returned to act as assistant coach this time.

"It felt good," Mannion said. "It's great to be back to help the guys, but it's not about winning. It's about making friends."

Moreover, Unified Champion Schools Northeast Ohio Region Manager James Yancy attended his second Spooky Bowl and will return for his second Turkey Bowl outing in November. He said he always looked forward to the matchups.

"It's magnificent. It's amazing how much student take our mission and vision and bring it to life. We really couldn't do it without them."

Meanwhile, Mort began coordinating efforts five years ago for Indian Creek and helped establish a combined team to play sporting events with similar teams from Buckeye Local, Edison and Steubenville. Indian Creek has hosted the annual Spooky Bowl and Turkey Bowl flag football games around Halloween and Thanksgiving, respectively, plus they have participated in basketball matchups and track meets on- and off-campus. The next event is the Turkey Bowl, where ICHS will play against Steubenville High School at Harding Stadium on Nov. 24.









Scenes from the Fall

The Special Connections Fall Festival attracted its largest attendance to date for a fun-filled day of games, goodies, goats, and more. Organizers said families had access to information from local organizations and resources and kids enjoyed inflatable games, a petting zoo, sweet treats, and pumpkin painting at the Bright Promise campus on Oct. 24.

SIBS

(Continued from Page 2)

sorships and support from the likes of Special Olympics Unified Ohio, Jeffco Services, the Jefferson County Fair Board, Edison Local Schools, and Jefferson County 4-H. Area residents and groups have also been involved with a flag presentation by Boy Scout Troop 20 of Richmond; the national anthem sung by local artist Glory Dami with ASL interpreter Haley Cherepko; informational tables in the arena from businesses, organizations, and community groups; the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Mobile Service unit; concessions by the junior fair board; judges Emily Moore, Kyle Koehnlein, and Suzanne McConnell; emcee Carl Glenn; and images by One-Niner Sports Photography. The evening also includes a special crowning of the SOULS King and Queen among the participants.

Since its inception, participation has nearly doubled with 18 youth participants and numerous mentors and volunteers. Ault said she created SOULS for Olivia and others like her to share a love of animals and have more inclusive 4-H activities.

"She had a hard time participating in something that I was passionate about: exhibiting animals at the fair," Ault continued. "[SOULS] was a way for her to be part of it in a safe and supportive environment, and it grew."

She hopes it will only get better.

"I hope to get more people, as many as we can," she concluded.

When she's not working on the SOULS show, Ault is busy making the grade and currently holds a 3.9 GPA at Edison. She is also active in sports and school organizations such as the Beta Club, as well as the Broken Fences 4-H Club. Ault is still mulling her future career options but has an interest in both law and agriculture. And for her, the sky's the limit.

Ohio SIBS is a free, community-based resource that fosters inclusion, empathy, and advocacy, celebrates the lifelong bond between the siblings and supports the unique challenges siblings of individuals with disabilities face. Among the activities provided are the Teen PhotoVoice creative photography series to sibling camps, summits and meet-ups. For more information, visit the website at www.ohiosibs.org.

FALL

(Continued from Front)

those who support our organization because it is a gift to be able to serve our community in this way."

Special Connections began about five years ago and became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization last year, offering a variety of events to support a community of belonging. One upcoming event is the annual Sensory-Friendly Santa visit set for mid-December.