



## **Special Olympics Florida and Ron Jon Surf Shop Bring First-Ever Surfing Program for Special Olympics Athletes to Duval County**

**JACKSONVILLE BEACH, Fla. -- (September 13, 2010) --** Special Olympics Florida and Ron Jon Surf Shop have partnered to bring its first-ever sanctioned surfing activities and instruction to Special Olympics athletes in Duval County.

The Duval County surfing program kicks off Tuesday, September 14 at 5:30 p.m. at 100 6th Avenue North behind the Casa Marina Hotel in Jacksonville Beach with an evening of instruction and education for nine Special Olympics athletes from around the Jacksonville area. The athletes will then participate in a series of weekly lessons to help them hone their skills and build upon what they learned at the inaugural event.

The evening program will include an opening safety orientation, one-on-one interaction between the Special Olympics athletes and the experienced team of professionals at the surf school and some relaxation and fun on the beach.

Special Olympics Florida and Ron Jon Surf Shop launched the overall surfing program June 5 in Cocoa Beach with a group of eight athletes from Brevard County. The six-week program was a great success and culminated with a surfing competition in front of hundreds of spectators.

The Duval County surfing program will be funded and managed by Ron Jon Surf Shop with support from Paul West, president of the Jacksonville Beach, Fla.-based Florida Surfing Association. West, a former professional surfer and surf contest promoter who has spent the past three decades traveling the world both surfing and promoting surfing-related events, will serve as the athletes' lead instructor and will manage a team of veteran surfers and volunteers in the Duval County effort.

"Surfers consider themselves members of a family, and that family welcomes people from all walks of life," said Craig Carroll, founder of Ron Jon Surf School and creator of the Special Olympics surfing program. "As we witnessed first-hand at our

inaugural Cocoa Beach instructional program, those with intellectual disabilities were not only accepted as part of the surfing culture, they were also embraced and encouraged in their efforts."

Special Olympics Florida and Ron Jon Surf Shop have begun a second session with a new group of Special Olympics athletes in Cocoa Beach and, in addition to Duval County, will expand the program to Stuart, Fla.

"Our athletes have once again shattered the stereotype of what people with intellectual disabilities are capable of. In just a few weeks, they became legitimate surfers!" said Special Olympics Florida President Monty Castevens, adding "Ron Jon Surf Shop has set in motion something that has great potential to benefit many, many more Special Olympics athletes, like those in Duval County, all while giving them the skills to enjoy the sport of surfing with their friends, families, and the broader surfing community, for the rest of their lives."

"We are excited to partner with Special Olympics Florida to bring surfing to athletes in Duval County," said Debbie Harvey, president and COO of Ron Jon Surf Shop. "As surfing enthusiasts, we look forward to working with these athletes and hope that they will come to love the sport as much as we do."

### **About Special Olympics Florida**

Special Olympics Florida provides year-round sports training and competition to children and adults with intellectual disabilities, at no cost to the athlete or their caregiver, as a means to achieve physical fitness, self-esteem, socialization skills, and the life skills necessary to be a productive, respected and contributing members of their communities. To learn more, visit [www.specialolympicsflorida.org](http://www.specialolympicsflorida.org).

### **About Ron Jon Surf Shop**

Ron Jon Surf Shop was founded in 1959 by surfing enthusiast Ron DiMenna. Two years later, he opened a tiny oceanside shop in Long Beach Island, N.J. The lifestyle-apparel and board-sports-equipment retailer has since opened stores in Cocoa Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, Ft. Myers, Key West, Panama City Beach, Fla., as well as Myrtle Beach, S.C. The flagship store in Cocoa Beach is the world's largest surf shop. It operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### **For more information:**

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