



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

STUART, Fla. -- (September 15, 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 Martin County.

The Martin County surfing program kicks off Thursday, September 16 at 5:30 p.m. on Stuart Beach at 889 NE Ocean Blvd., behind the Elliott Museum, with an evening of instruction and education for eight Special Olympics athletes who range in age from 13 to 35. The athletes will then participate in a series of five weekly lessons to help them hone their skills and build on their experiences.

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 program was considered a success and culminated with a surfing competition in front of hundreds of spectators.

The Martin County surfing program will be funded and managed by the Cocoa Beach, Fla.-based Ron Jon Surf Shop, and veteran members of the South Florida-based Surfers for Autism (SFA) will provide the training during the weekly sessions. SFA was founded in 2007 by Don Ryan and a handful of socially conscious surfers, and the nonprofit organization travels the state to introduce the sport of surfing to children with intellectual disabilities. To date, SFA has taken 2,000 children surfing in seven coastal communities all over Florida's east coast.

"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 Martin County, have expanded the program to Jacksonville, 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 Martin 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 Martin 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.

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:

Ryan Julison, Ron Jon Surf Shop, (321) 377-6877

Amie Dugan, Special Olympics Florida, (407) 402-8599