

BURGERVILLE'S SPECIAL OLYMPICS MEDALISTS

by Rick Thum, Woodland Burgerville

The runners have run their races, the swimmers have swum their laps, the gymnasts have danced their way into our hearts, national anthems have been played, and the flame has been extinguished. Another Summer Olympics is in the books.

However, a lesser known set of athletic competitions are continuously under way. These are known as the Special Olympics. According to *specialolympics.org* there are 4.7 million athletes with intellectual disabilities involved in Special Olympics programs around the world. Burgerville has several of these athletes who serve on our teams in the restaurant when they are not training, and we would like to introduce you to two of them.

Michael Neketuk has worked as a lobby attendant on the Camas Burgerville team for two years, almost as long as he has been participating in Special Olympics. He competes in both basketball and soccer. Michael's basketball team, the Washougal Panthers, won gold in the qualifying round in Camas, and earned both silver and bronze medals in the district event in Wenatchee. Michael says he really enjoys connecting with the other teams. Everyone plays their hardest and losing doesn't matter to him, it's having fun that counts. According to Michael, the Special Olympics really try to promote good sportsmanship. When asked what the Special Olympics slogan is, Michael responds, "Do your best and keep playing... and oh yeah... never give up." Basketball practice has not yet begun for the fall and soccer returns next summer, so until then he is going to keep working at Burgerville where he enjoys connecting with guests, being friendly, and making people happy.

Another amazing Burgerville athlete is Bryan Harris. Bryan has been a part of the Burgerville team for three years. If you've



Burgerville employees and Special Olympians, Michael & Bryan

ever had our delicious Walla Walla Onion Rings at the Kelso Burgerville, they quite possibly were prepared by him. This last August Bryan went to the state softball championship in Everett and came back with a gold medal. It is one of a number he has won over the last several years. Bryan also competes in bowling and swimming. Bryan credits the Special Olympics with giving him really good coaching and advice. In fact, he boasts that his mom is jealous because he has become a better bowler than her. Brian says his three favorite things in the world are competing in Special Olympics, working at Burgerville and spending time with his girlfriend. This fall Bryan will also be attending Lower Columbia College (LCC) where he will be studying math.

We hope that you will stop by our Camas or Kelso Burgerville restaurants this fall to meet these two athletes and congratulate them on their achievements. They will undoubtedly greet you with a smile and a hearty hello.