

# Athletes with developmental disabilities inspire: Rich Archbold

By [Rich Archbold](#), Long Beach Press Telegram

Posted: 03/27/15, 5:07 PM PDT |

[0 Comments](#)

Manasa Iyer threw her arms in the air just like she did when she won silver medals at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, five years ago.

But this time Manasa's victorious cheer followed an inspirational speech she gave to a packed ballroom at the Special Olympics 2015 dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel earlier this month.

The audience responded with a standing ovation as everyone pumped their arms in the air in a tribute to Manasa and other Special Olympics athletes.

This event was similar to the energy and enthusiasm produced a week later by the 5,000 who participated in the 19th Arc Walk for Independence in Downey.

Both events saluted intellectually and developmentally disabled individuals.

"These athletes are the real heroes in our community," said Sheriff Jim McDonnell, Long Beach's former police chief who received the Special Olympics Champion Award.

Manasa, 19, of Cerritos, said she started in Special Olympics when she was 7, "about the time my mother died of breast cancer at the age of 39."

Manasa said she and her brother and sister have intellectual disabilities.

Manasa, who is autistic, said her hero is her father "who keeps me inspired to never give up when things get tough."

She asked her dad to stand, and there wasn't a prouder face in the audience than his.

Manasa won three medals in snowshoeing in the Special Olympics World Winter Games in 2009.

"I felt like a star," she said. "It was the best time of my life."

Manasa invited guests to meet her at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Los Angeles County this summer. Long Beach will host seven World Games events between July 24

and Aug. 1 in addition to serving as a host town for Olympic athletes, said Bill Shumard, president/CEO of Special Olympics Southern California.

“Don’t miss out on the best time of your life,” said Manasa. “We are like one big happy family.”

At the Arc Walk for Independence, Louis Gutierrez, a 38-year-old Downey resident, was supported by 80 family members wearing Los Angeles Lakers jerseys and calling themselves Team Laker Louis.

Louis said that support and help he has received from The Arc “has saved my life.”

The walk got off to a rousing start with the help of the Mayfair High School marching band, Laker Girls leading the crowd in calisthenics and county Supervisor Don Knabe providing an inspirational prayer.

<iframe id="51f0112cbf35d" name="51f0112cbf35d" src="http://mediaservices-d.openxenterprise.com/w/1.0/afr?aid=458204&cb=INSERT\_RANDOM\_NUMBER\_HERE" frameborder="0" scrolling="no" width="300" height="250"><a href="http://mediaservices-d.openxenterprise.com/w/1.0/rc?cs=51f0112cbf35d&cb=INSERT\_RANDOM\_NUMBER\_HERE" ></a></iframe>

Advertisement

Donna Lindley, CEO of the local Arc chapter, said community awareness is a key to improving the quality of life for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Another key is the lack of money to support the state’s estimated 280,000 developmentally disabled individuals.

Assemblymember Cristina Garcia told the crowd at the Arc walk that the state must do more to restore funding for the disabled.

Services for the disabled have been declining since the 1990s.

A report prepared by the Association of Regional Center Agencies is titled: “On the Brink of Collapse: The Consequences of Underfunding California’s Developmental Services System.”

ARCA is urging Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature to rebuild the state’s community-based service system for those with developmental disabilities.

In the meantime, nonprofits like The Arc and Special Olympics continue to do a Herculean job in serving the disabled community.

Manasa Iyer and Louis Gutierrez are shining examples of their good work, but the need is great and more help is needed

