

COMMUNITY



Left: Breeounna Forbes grooms Wildfire as ATRC volunteer Penni Powell looks on. Right: Jaylan Matheson rides Marley as sidewalkers Chris Ciccotello and Belinda Lennon help out. Special Olympics Mitchell County has returned to training and has returned to working with the ATRC.

Special Olympics Mitchell County returns to training

In March 2020, Special Olympics Mitchell County shut down in response to COVID-19. Slowly, Special Olympics athletes of Mitchell County have returned to training.

In 2021, Special Olympics Mitchell County athletes participated in a national exercise, health and wellness program called Partner Up Power Up. This program could be carried out in an athlete's home, at school, or in a workshop setting.

In 2022, the Partner Up Power Up program was implemented again. Incentives were given to athletes when their milestones were reported to the state office of Special Olympics North Carolina.

This spring, the 29 school-aged athletes of the local program returned to Appalachian Therapeutic Riding Center for a series of riding lessons. Athletes, teachers and volunteers have a long, loving relationship with the staff, volunteers and the horses of ATRC.

"It was thrilling to return to the barn and groom the horses as well as ride," said Special Olympics Mitchell

County coordinator Sarah Hobart. "The equestrian experience provides our athletes with improved balance, strength and range of motion and improved coordination and motor skills. Our riders have also shown increased confidence, self-esteem and emotional regulation."

ATRC is always looking for volunteers. To learn more, call 675-5630 or email atrcriding@gmail.com. Volunteers are needed for the five camps this summer: Mental Health and Learning, Children with Physical Challenges, Literacy, Preschool and School Readiness and the last will be determined by need. Visit atrcriding.com for information.

Special Olympics Mitchell County high school athletes returned to bowling this spring. In September, the four adult bowling teams and the bocce teams will begin training. The K-12 athletes will also bowl regularly.

"The athletes and coaches are all in agreement," Hobart said. "It is great to be back."



Aiden Houser rides Butterscotch as Meri Stella leads the way.

Story Trail Committee, Run For Holland Foundation select new book

The Riverside Story Trail is made possible in part by the funding and support of the Run For Holland Foundation.

Run For Holland just completed its 2022 5K and 10K event in downtown Spruce Pine. Run For Holland is, as their site states, "A Race for Those with Disabilities."

The Riverside Story Trail Book Selection Committee and the Run For Holland Foundation selected the book *We Move Together* by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos to be the book on display during the Run for Holland event.

We Move Together is a brightly illustrated book centering on disability justice that follows along a mixed-ability, diverse group of kids who show the reader how "all bodies" move together in different spaces and in different ways.

"We are so excited to partner with the story trail. Run For Holland, ultimately, exists to love and support families with special needs," said Run For Holland founder and director Adam Burlison. "By partnering with Story Trail, our hope is to mix in books that bring about love, support and awareness to special needs as families enjoy this great local resource."

Two of the goals of the Story Trail planning team are to select books that "encourage community dialogue around important topics" as well as "include everyone, prioritizing accessibility to all, including English and Spanish audio." The Riverside Story Trail is a unique, one-of-a-kind experience, because the book stations that meander through the park are also accompanied by audio stations, which at the touch of a button, will read the displayed page in Spanish and English.

It does make the story trail more accessible, as does the movement prompts



Run For Holland founder Adam Burlison addresses the crowd at the most recent event. The RFH Foundation has helped select the next Story Trail book.

that encourage families to move and interact with the book. These are written in Spanish and English, as well as recorded.

Do you remember that first interaction with hearing a story read to you? Perhaps it was on a parent's or grandparent's lap or maybe a teacher or librarian who had that uncanny ability to do the character voices?

Studies show that early literacy skills develop through positive interactions with books and other people, and sometimes special voices transport listeners, making the reading experience truly special.

On the story trail, Maria Fernanda Nunez provides the narration in Spanish. Maria is a Colombian born interdisciplinary artist currently based in North Carolina. She is also a Core Fellow at the Penland School of Craft.

"What I've appreciated the most of

working on the recording of these stories is to get to imagine Spanish speaking and bilingual families experience and read through these together and for children getting to hear the language of their household being validated public space," she said.

For the English narration of *We Move Together*, folks may recognize the distinctive voice of Alan Tinney, who in his past, was a radio personality at WTOE and then WNCW, out of Spindale.

He is a sixth generation Mitchell County resident who has an eclectic background in radio, making music, working as an Emergency Transmitter Engineer and custom building houses and studios. About seven years ago, he was injured and has been in a wheelchair since.

"As an avid reader and supporter of the library, this is the perfect book for a wheelchair user," Tinney said. "I'm glad

to help."

There are many moving parts to the Story Trail, like the book selection committee meetings, the assembling of the story trail pages, including cutting, laminating and editing, the installation and maintenance, the translations & audio recordings; the meticulous process of audio editing, transferring to drives and then installing once again at the audio stations, the choreography of movement accompaniment as well as translation from English to Spanish. During all this, keeping the book itself protected in its original format, both visually and audibly, is at the forefront.

The Story Trail is a collaborative effort, a community project to encourage literacy, movement, family time and use of Riverside Park.

All are invited to come read or listen along to *We Move Together*. Children and adults can be transformed by books.

Funding and support for the Story Trail is made possible by Run For Holland, the Quartz Corp, the Town of Spruce Pine, the YMCA of Mitchell County, Spruce Pine Public Library, Penland School of Craft, the Blue Ridge Partnership for Children, Rotary Club of Spruce Pine, community-minded volunteers and donors.

The major infrastructure is complete, but to help sponsor the Riverside Story Trail, contact the AMY Regional Library Office at 682-4476.

The project was also made possible by funding from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (IMLS grant number LS-249980-OLS-21).



Part of the new Story Trail book sits on display in Spruce Pine Riverside Park. The selection committee and the Run For Holland Foundation selected "*We Move Together*" by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire and Eduardo Trejos. The display of the new book went hand-in-hand with the Run For Holland event this past month. The displays feature both English and Spanish. The Story Trail is a collaborative community project made possible by several area partners.