

Juliette Rizzo (in gray suit) was presented with the PALA award (the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award) by Secretary Tommy Thompson.



# "I Can Do It, You Can Do It!"

BY JULIE VENNERS YANNES

On May 26, 2004, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson launched a new initiative to support good health and physical activity for the six million American children who have disabilities. The "I Can Do It, You Can Do It!" campaign was officially inaugurated at the Hubert H. Humphrey Building in Washington, DC.

Secretary Thompson, along with top government health officials, self-advocates, children, and physical fitness experts all came together to celebrate the active lifestyles of individuals with disabilities by presenting two women with disabilities and their mentors with the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA). The award, sponsored by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports is based on a mentor/mentee approach. The ceremony also focused on the dangers of obesity and

the need for increased activity to our nation's young people, particularly those with disabilities.

"We may tend to overlook that people with disabilities are at higher risk for the conditions that can result from inactivity, and we may even overlook the reality that people with disabilities can be extremely able in participating in activities that are as challenging, and even more challenging, than the ones that are more familiar to us. We need to reach out to people with disabilities, and especially to the young, to develop lifetime habits of activity and healthy nutrition," emphasized Secretary Thompson.

Dr. Margaret Giannini, Director of the HHS Office on Disability agreed. "Today we recognize both the need for this program and the hard work ahead for all of the partners who have agreed to help bring mentors and mentees together to provide indi-

vidualized programs of physical activity for young Americans with disabilities," she said. Dr. Giannini also celebrated her 83rd birthday at the celebration and Secretary Tommy Thompson led the audience and children from Catherine T. Reed School in a round of "Happy Birthday."

The students from C.T. Reed School were then given a pep talk and official title of "Junior Assistant Attorney Generals" from Surgeon General Richard Carmona. "Kids, don't sit around and watch TV all of the time. I need your help! Stay active and eat healthy food," reminded Dr. Carmona. The Surgeon General then addressed the adults in the audience, "We need to provide funding for programs and technical assistance. Communities are what make this happen. Obesity is a huge cost to our nation. Nine million children in the United States are obese. Obesity contributes to many of our country's diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. Keeping kids with disabilities active will help keep them healthier."

Special guests Judy Woodroof and U.S. Army Captain David Rozelle were on hand to talk about their own personal experiences with the importance of staying active and fit.

Judy Woodroof, CNN correspondent and former NBC News White House correspondent, said, "Although I could do more to keep myself fit, my 22-year-old son, Jeff, who is in a wheelchair because of symptoms from a brain injury, is a happy person because he stays active. His favorite activity is adaptive skiing in Colorado."

US Army Captain David Rozelle agreed, "Staying active has made both my physical and mental recovery easier." Captain Rozelle lost his right foot serving in Iraq for the United States Army. His vehicle ran over a loaded mine last year, and he has remained on active duty. He immediately began rehabilitation by skiing in the Ski Spectacular and will run two triathlons before returning to Iraq to fight the war on terrorism in later this year.

Secretary Tommy Thompson said physi-



"The National Anthem" is led by John Register of the United States Paralympics as the students of the CT Reed Elementary school, and Dr. Carmona and Judy Woodroof (CNN anchor) join the ceremony.



L to R: Kirk Bauer of Disabled Sports USA; Cristina Beato, MD, Acting Assistant Secretary for Health; US Surgeon General Richard Carmona, MD; US Secretary of DHHS Tommy Thompson; Andrew Houghton—Mentor from Shake-a-leg Miami; Mannuela Hoyos and Juliette Rizzo—both PALA winners.

cal activity is good medicine. "We have such a short time to do things in life; we need to take care of ourselves and our bodies first and foremost. President Bush believes in physical activity, and we should join him in becoming active."

Singer and songwriter Benny Mardones wrapped up the rally portion of the launch by serenading guests with his new release

"I Need a Miracle." Benny is best known for his 1980's hit "Into the Night," for which he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. After being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2002, Mr. Mardones has advocated for children with disabilities and raised awareness and funds for Parkinson's research. Benny attributes his positive attitude to a phrase he learned

while serving in the Army. "One of my mentors in the Army once told us that the last four letters in the word 'American' spell 'I can!' I have always lived by the motto that I can do anything I set my mind to accomplishing." Benny's advice to parents caring for children with disabilities is to not make your child any different than any

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## Kids from Catherine T. Reed School "Rock" at Activity Exhibits

L to R: Cameron Wilson, age 5, enjoys his way back down from a rock climbing event; Kathy Serrano-Dunne, age 7, pedals an adaptive bike with volunteers Allison Zwanzig from the American Therapeutic Recreation Association and Geoff Hopkins of the Paralyzed Veterans of America; Gregory Carter, age 12, putts golf balls with enthusiasm.



With their new titles of Junior Assistant Attorney Generals, lovingly appointed by Surgeon General Richard Carmona, dozens of students left the celebration inside and flocked to the outdoor activities. Students from Catherine T. Reed School in Lanham, Maryland, assisted by their teachers, volunteers, and physical therapists got out and kept active as they promised Dr. Carmona they would.

The outdoor event, which was held outside the Hubert H. Humphrey Building, featured seven different physical sporting activities. Among the favorites were a climbing wall with adaptive equipment for children with different kinds of disabilities, plus bowling for children with physical limitations, including those who are blind. In addition, golf, table tennis, basketball, hand cycling, and an obstacle course were tested by the kids.

Twelve-year-old Gregory Carter, a student at Catherine T. Reed said, "This is one of my favorite days ever, it makes me want to run and play and maybe be a basketball player when I grow up!"

He was in an accident at age 20 that required him to use a wheelchair for mobility. "I didn't do anything physically active for five years in which time I gained 30 pounds. Once I became active again I lost all of the extra weight and felt so much better," said Houghton. He attributes being Manuela's mentor, and seeing her successes in sailing, as one of the biggest rewards of his life.

Juliette Rizzo, from Rockville, Maryland was also honored as a PALA award winner. Juliette's quest for a healthier lifestyle began with a question posed to her during the Ms. Wheelchair Maryland contest, which she went on to win in January 2004. The judges asked Juliette what one thing she would like to change about herself. Her reply was, "I would like to focus on improving my personal health and wellness as a person with a disability." Ms. Rizzo had gained 31 pounds over the last five years due to having to sit in her wheelchair more frequently because of stiffening joints from rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia. After winning her crown, Juliette took her pledge to improve her activity level seriously. She enrolled in a mainstream health challenge sponsored by Discovery Stores. Juliette was one of 350,000 individuals who participated, and she was so successful that Discovery Health Channel aired a segment on her workout routine, which included working with a specialized trainer in the water. So far, she has already lost seven percent of her body fat, and a total of 14 pounds.

Juliette's mentor, Kirk Bauer, executive director of Disabled Sports USA, was also honored at the event. Juliette credits Kirk for giving her the encouragement to take her level of exercise to the next level. She is now taking up her fellow award winner Manuela's sport of sailing. Ms. Rizzo glows as she says, "I am now living a childhood dream by competing and enjoying sports!"

In addition to the theme of the campaign "I Can Do It, You Can Do It," individuals with and without disabilities can learn from the more candid advice from award winner Juliette Rizzo. "No excuses, use it or lose it ... it's never too late!"

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other kid, have a "can do" attitude, and don't pity them.

### THE PALA (PRESIDENT'S ACTIVE LIFESTYLE AWARD) MENTOR/MENTEE WINNERS

Manuela Hoyos from Coral Gables, Florida, is 16 years old and moved to the U.S. from Columbia three years ago. She has spina bifida and has competed with Shake-a-Leg Miami as a sailboat racer. She placed third at the sailing national competition in March. "I feel free from my wheelchair when I am sailing because I can do everything like everyone else," said Manuela. She trains at least 60 minutes per day, five days a week. Manuela now eats a lot of fruit, drinks more water, and has lost five pounds. "There has also been a great improvement in my

grades because I feel better having lost the extra weight," shares Manuela. "I am now ready to take it to the next level. If I can do it, you can do it!"

Andrew Houghton, Manuela's mentor, serves on the board of Shake-a-Leg Miami.



Ms. Wheelchair Maryland, Juliette Rizzo