

SPECIAL OLYMPICS AIRLIFT TAKES FLIGHT NATIONWIDE; DOVE 1 ARRIVES AT ST. PAUL DOWNTOWN AIRPORT

Approximately 130 Cessna, Beechcraft and Hawker aircraft and volunteer pilots mobilize to transport more than 800 Special Olympics athletes and coaches to the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games



▲ Special Olympics Airlift takes flight nationwide; Dove 1 arrives at St. Paul Downtown Airport

ST. PAUL, Minn. (June 19, 2026) — The [2026 Special Olympics Airlift](#) officially took flight today as all participating Cessna, Beechcraft and Hawker aircraft, known as Doves, departed from airports across the country. Dove 1 for arrival day, a Cessna Citation Latitude generously operated by [Prent Corporation](#), landed at St. Paul Downtown Airport (STP) carrying Special Olympic athletes and delegation members, signaling the start of Airlift arrivals for the [Special Olympics USA Games](#).

The arrival signals the start of the world's largest cumulative peacetime airlift spanning more than 40 years, a coordinated aviation effort organized by [Textron Aviation](#), a [Textron Inc.](#) (NYSE: TXT) company, that transports hundreds of Special Olympics athletes and

coaches from multiple states to compete on the national stage. Throughout the day, approximately 130 aircraft will arrive at STP in a carefully orchestrated operation with aircraft landing every three to four minutes.

“The arrival of Dove 1 is always a powerful moment,” said Ron Draper, president and CEO, Textron Aviation. “It represents months of planning, the generosity of the aviation community and most importantly, the excitement and anticipation of athletes arriving ready to compete.”

Giving Back Through Flight

The Special Olympics Airlift mobilizes volunteer pilots and aircraft from across the country who donate their time and resources in support of the Airlift. Now in its ninth year, the initiative has transported over 10,000 athletes and coaches to Special Olympics events, giving them a first-class experience ahead of the competition. Pilots, crew members and ground teams launched departures Friday morning from 26 locations nationwide including Grand Rapids, Houston, Nashville, Orlando, Phoenix and Washington, D.C., each hosting sendoff celebrations as local communities bid farewell to their Special Olympics delegations traveling to Minnesota for the Special Olympics USA Games.

“This is one of the most meaningful missions we fly,” said Chris Clawson, Dove 1 Pilot, Prent Corporation. “The Airlift brings together aviation and purpose in a way that creates unforgettable experiences for these athletes and reminds all of us we’re part of something much bigger than ourselves.”

Throughout the day, additional Doves will continue arriving at STP, with athletes greeted by volunteers and Special Olympics representatives before traveling onward to the Games. The carefully choreographed operation relies on collaboration among pilots, air traffic controllers, airport authorities, volunteers and Special Olympics staff.

With total roundtrip miles expected to reach almost 300,000 nm, and coordinated arrivals spanning hours of precision planning, the 2026 Airlift will once again demonstrate the scale, reliability and generosity of the aviation community.

Athletes in the Air

For many athletes, the Airlift marks their first time flying and serves as a defining moment in their journey to the Special Olympics USA Games. The Airlift ensures athletes arrive ready to compete, while also delivering an experience that celebrates their achievements before the competition begins.

“Traveling to Minnesota and taking part in the 2026 USA Games is an opportunity to climb higher,” said Emmanuel Benitez, Special Olympics Indiana, flag football athlete. “USA Games is a reason to train harder and expect the unexpected.”

All-Stars for Athletes

The 2026 Special Olympics Airlift is supported by high-profile advocates and ambassadors who share a commitment to inclusion and community.

“The Special Olympics Airlift represents the best of teamwork, leadership and heart,” said Peyton Manning, Honorary Chair, Special Olympics Airlift. “It’s amazing to see so many people come together to make sure these athletes get the opportunity they deserve to shine on a national stage.”

“These athletes have trained so hard for this, so it’s pretty special to see the aviation community come together to help them get there,” said Dierks Bentley, Ambassador, Special Olympics Airlift. “When you see that kind of grit, you want to do whatever you can to support it. I’m honored to be a small part of it.”

For updates and behind-the-scenes coverage of this week’s events, visit <https://airlift.txtav.com/>.

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We inspire the journey of flight. For more than 95 years, Textron Aviation Inc., a Textron Inc. company, has empowered our collective talent across the Beechcraft, Cessna and Hawker brands to design and deliver the best aviation experience for our customers. With a range that includes everything from business jets, turboprops, and high-performance pistons, to special mission, military trainer and defense products, Textron Aviation has the most versatile and comprehensive aviation product portfolio in the world and a workforce that has produced more than half of all general aviation aircraft worldwide. Customers in more than 170 countries rely on our legendary performance, reliability and versatility, along with our trusted global customer service network, for affordable and flexible flight. For more information, visit www.txtav.com.

About Special Olympics USA Games

The 2026 Special Olympics USA Games—scheduled for June 20-26, 2026, across Minnesota’s Twin Cities with sports competitions at the University of Minnesota and the National Sports Center in Blaine—is a national celebration of inclusivity, changing perceptions and the ability of the human spirit rising above limitations. The USA Games, with co-presenting partners Jersey Mike’s Subs and United Healthcare, will be one of the biggest U.S. sporting events of the year, drawing tens of thousands of fans to celebrate the ability of over 3,000 incredible athletes from all 50 states as they compete in 16 Olympic-type team and individual sports. As a state with a long history of championing diversity, equity and inclusion, the USA Games now bring an unrivaled opportunity to spark new energy around the Special Olympics movement and create a lasting legacy of positive change.

About Textron Inc.

Textron Inc. is a multi-industry company that leverages its global network of aircraft, defense, industrial and finance businesses to provide customers with innovative solutions and services. Textron is known around the world for its powerful brands such as Bell, Cessna, Beechcraft, Pipistrel, Jacobsen, Kautex, Lycoming, E-Z-GO, and Textron Systems. For more information, visit: www.textron.com.

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