

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

Approximately 130 aircraft will transport more than 1,000 athletes to the USA Games

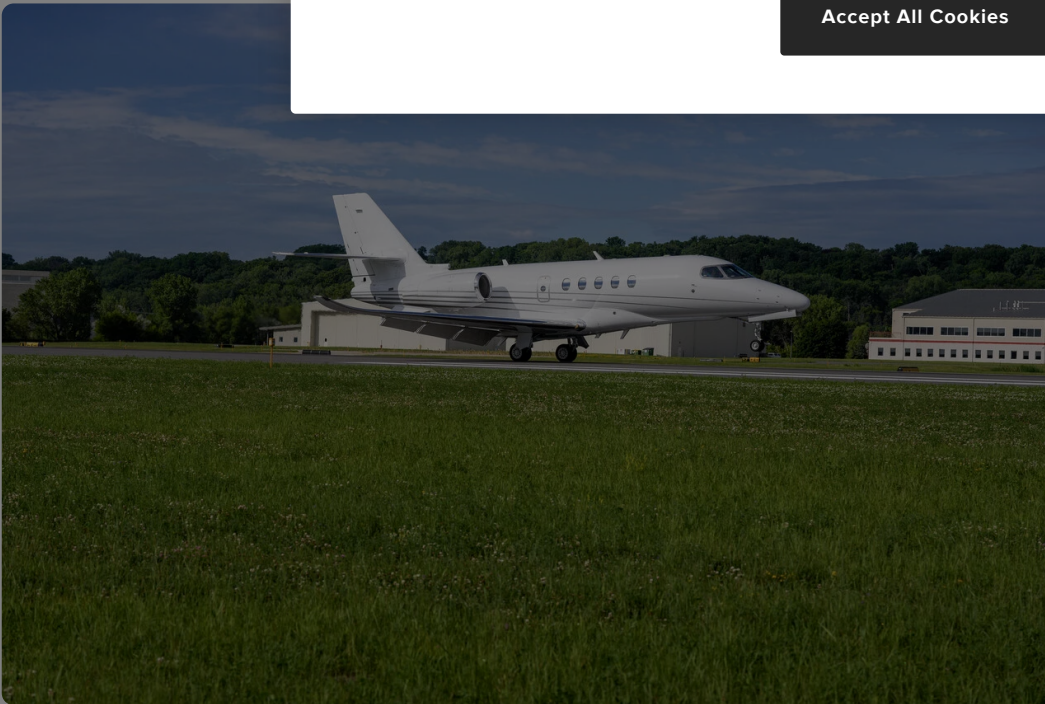
athletes mobilize to Special Olympics

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**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.

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## Giving Back Thru

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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.

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the initiative has

## 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 providing them with the necessary information and support before the competition begins.

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## 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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## Contact details

### Airlift Questions

[airlift@txtav.com](mailto:airlift@txtav.com)

### Hailey Tucker

Special Olympics

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