

Clipped Wings returns to support the 2026 Special Olympics Airlift

The Special Olympics Airlift is a coordinated experience designed to ensure athletes receive up to the moment they have played a meaningful

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coordinated and celebrated reception Clipped Wings has

Clipped Wings has volunteered with Special Olympics since 1968 and the Airlift since 1991, greeting athlete arrivals with energy, encouragement and celebration. As delegations arrive, Clipped Wings team members, alongside Textron Aviation and other industry volunteers, help create an environment that sets the tone for the Games — one rooted in excitement, pride and belonging. For many athletes, that arrival moment is their first interaction with the Games environment, making each cheer, smile and welcome an important part of the overall experience.



That commitment spans decades. Christel Ilg, a former United Airlines flight attendant, began volunteering with Special Olympics as part of Clipped Wings after the organization was formed by retired United flight attendants. Christel first volunteered at the 2010 Special Olympics in Minnesota's Twin Cities. That Airline was one of approximately 1,400 athletes and crew members involved in the operation and the importance of the event.

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Clipped Wings will continue to support Special Olympics USA Games, returning to the Champion Center to cheer on arriving and departing athletes. Christel will be onsite again this June, continuing a lifelong commitment to welcoming athletes during one of the most emotional and meaningful moments of their Games experience. In recognition of her decades of support of Special Olympics dating back to 1968, Christel was awarded an honorary gold medal at the 2022 Special Olympics.

"Welcoming athletes as they arrive at the Champion Center is one of the most powerful moments of the Airlift," said Christel. "You can see the anticipation, the nerves and the excitement all at once. Being there to encourage them, celebrate their journey and let them know how supported they are is something our team truly values, and we're proud to be part of that experience again in 2026."

Behind each arrival is a tightly managed operational effort involving precise scheduling, ground coordination and crowd flow management. Volunteer support at the Champion Center is critical to keeping those moments organized while ensuring athletes feel celebrated. Returning volunteers like Clipped Wings bring experience and consistency that helps the operation run smoothly while preserving the emotional impact of each welcome.

As preparations continue for the 2026 USA Games, Clipped Wings' return highlights the importance of community support beyond the flight itself. Their continued involvement

reinforces the idea that every role — from pilots to ground teams to volunteers welcoming athletes — contributes to delivering a meaningful Games experience.

By once again stepping forward to support athletes worldwide, Clipped Wings helps ensure the Airlift delivers not only a safe and secure flight but also a warm and affirming welcome for every athlete who boards our aircraft.

Textron Aviation invites you to join our team and help us continue to contribute to Special Olympics, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Visit airlift.txtav.com for more information.

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About Special Olympics Airlift

The Special Olympics Airlift, organized by [Textron Aviation](#) and its customers in collaboration with the Special Olympics community and impact.

Since the Airlift's inception, we have supported the aviation community to transport athletes to the Special Olympics USA Games, helping ensure

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