

Aviation Community Unites for Special Olympics Airlift

The Special Olympics Airlift is ensuring athletes are ready to compete as champions.

Led by Cessna and its customers and the

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dignity and belonging at a national scale. By removing financial and logistical barriers, the event ensures athletes from across the country reach the Games and are recognized for what they have achieved.

The videos below capture the people, moments and relationships that made that journey possible in 2026.



▲ Meet our Legendary Volunteers at the Special Olympics Airlift 2026

A national celebration, measured in moments

The 2026 Special Olympics Airlift reflected the scale of that commitment. More than 800 athletes and coaches were transported to and from the USA Games, supported by 132 Cessna and Beechcraft aircraft and more than \$7 million in financial and in-kind contributions.

The numbers only tell part of the story. For the pilots, owners, operators, crews, volunteers, parents, and athletes, the journey is a celebration. Everyone feels celebrated from the moment they board the aircraft.

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▲ THIS is the 2026 Special Olympics Airlift

The journey through the athletes’ eyes

For many athletes, the Airlift is the first sign that the wider world is cheering for them. The experience begins with anticipation among teammates and coaches, continues in flight and builds toward the welcome waiting on the tarmac.

Aircraft owners and operators volunteered their time, aircraft and resources to make each journey possible, while volunteers greeted athletes on arrival with applause, energy and pride. Together, those moments turned travel into a shared celebration of belonging, teamwork and achievement.

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▲ Special Olympics Airlift: The flight of a lifetime

An aviation community united by purpose

Spanning nearly 40 years, the Airlift once again demonstrated what is possible when aircraft owners, flight crews, industry partners, airport teams and air traffic professionals work together on behalf of athletes.

That collaboration extended across the national airspace system. In the Twin Cities, the Federal Aviation Administration, Metropolitan Airports Commission and other aviation stakeholders worked together to support a secure and seamless operation.

Industry supporters including Signature Aviation, NBAA, EAA, GAMA, AOPA and the Citation Jet Pilots organization also played an important role in making the experience possible for athletes and coaches.

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▲ Special Olympics Airlift | Incredible things happen when the aviation community works together

Thank you for making the journey possible

These videos offer a look back at a remarkable effort made possible by people across the aviation community.

From aircraft owners and flight crews to volunteers, industry partners, airport teams and supporters, thousands of people chose to show up for Special Olympics athletes and coaches. Their collective commitment transformed travel into a celebration and helped ensure athletes arrived at the USA Games feeling welcomed, valued and ready to compete.

That is the lasting story of the 2026 Special Olympics Airlift: not simply the movement of aircraft, but a community coming together to honor athletes through service and purpose.

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▲ To everyone who made the Special Olympics Airlift possible, thank you

Looking for more? Explore the full [gallery](#) and revisit the moments that made this year's Airlift possible.

Contact details

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