

Special Olympics athletes begin journey home as Special Olympics USA Games conclude; Dove 1 departs St. Paul Downtown Airport

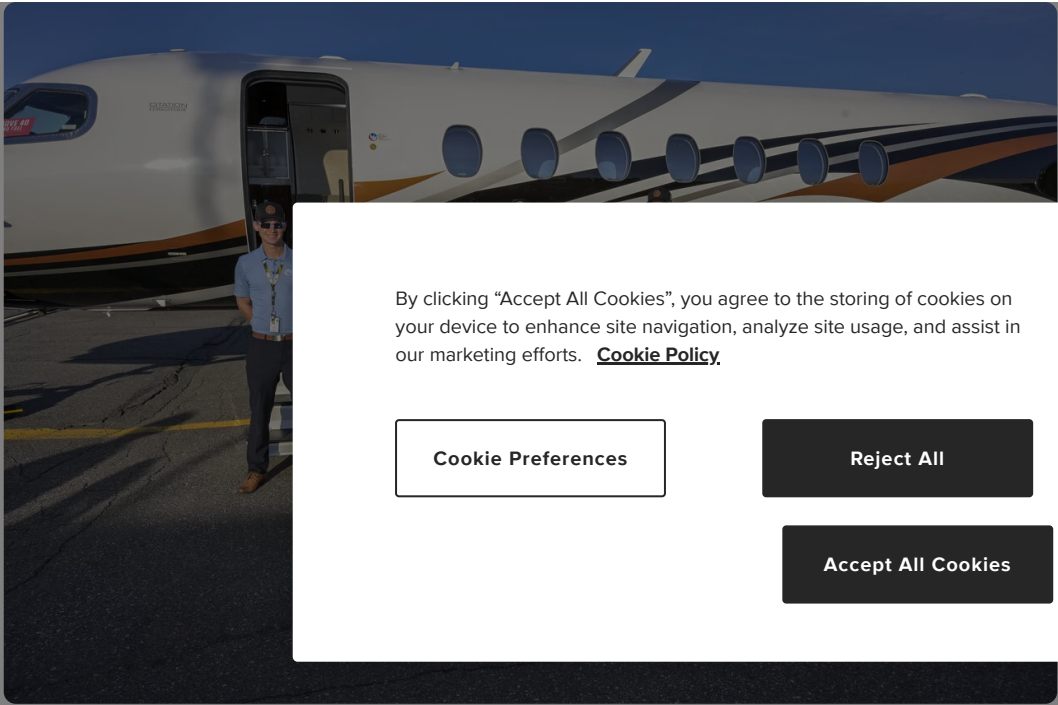
Volunteer pilots and aircraft from across the world's largest peacetime airlift program

ST. PAUL, Minn. (June 27, 2026) — The Special Olympics USA Games concluded today as athletes began their journeys home following the Special Olympics USA Games, with Dove 1 departing St. Paul Downtown Airport (STP) as the first aircraft to carry delegations back to their communities.



Dove 1 leads coordinated departures

Dove 1 on departure day, generously donated by Omani and Jeanie Carson, initiated the day's outbound departures, marking a significant milestone as athletes concluded a week of competition, celebration and connection at the Games.



The departures represent the return phase of one of the world’s largest peacetime airlifts, a coordinated aviation effort that transports hundreds of Special Olympics athletes and coaches to and from the Games.



Volunteer pilots, crew members and ground teams coordinated departure operations throughout the day as delegations traveled from St. Paul to destinations across the country. Each Dove flight is operated by crews who donate their time, aircraft and resources in support of the Airlift.

“Departure day is always meaningful,” said Ron Draper, president and CEO, Textron Aviation. “It reflects the achievements of the athletes and the collective effort of an aviation community committed to supporting them from take-off to homecoming.”

Aviation community

Throughout the day

families and commu

their friends,

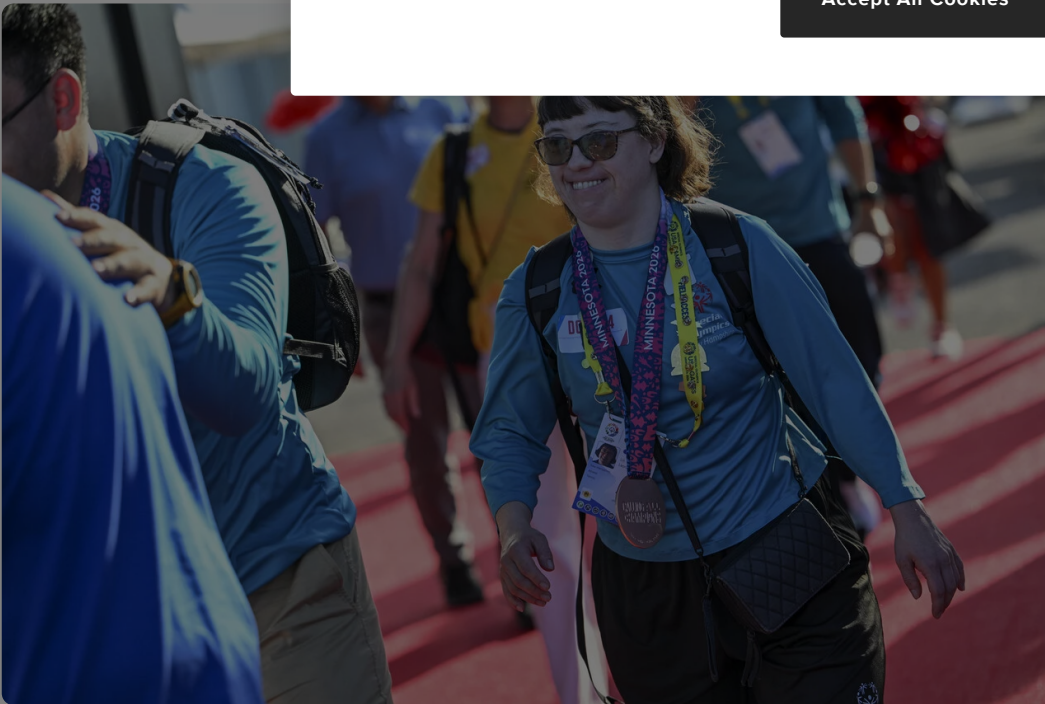
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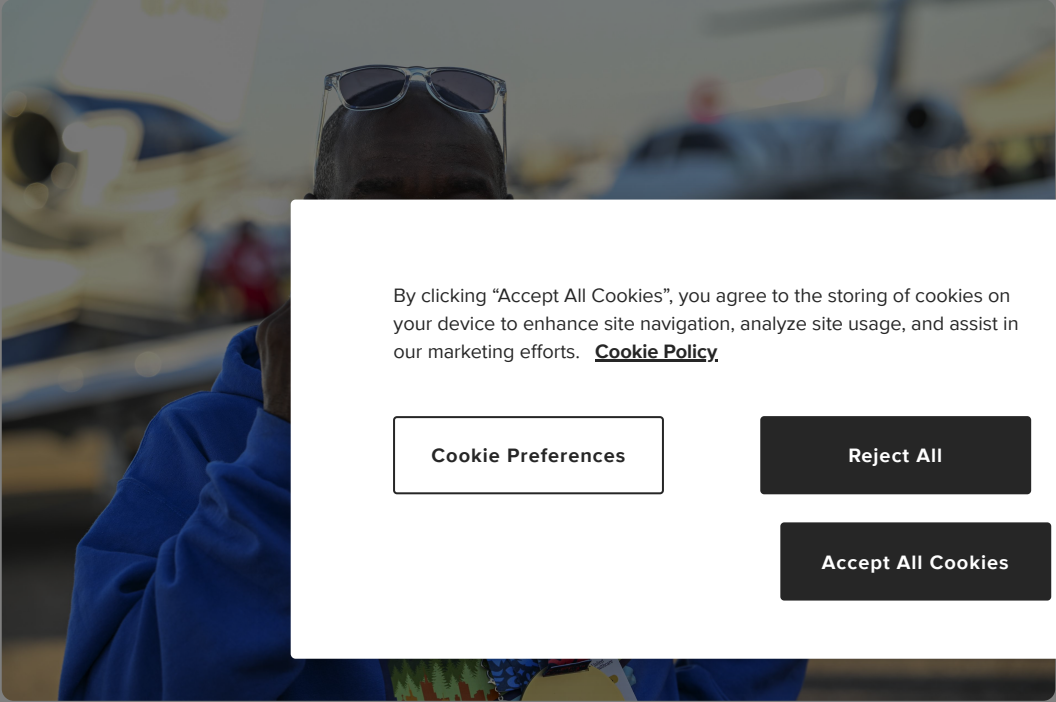
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Now in its ninth year, the Special Olympics Airlift continues to demonstrate how aviation can unite communities and expand access to participation for athletes with intellectual disabilities through a dignified and celebratory travel experience.

Everybody needs a lift every now and then. For updates and behind-the-scenes coverage of return flights, visit airlift.txtav.com or follow along on social media by following Textron Aviation, Cessna and Beechcraft.



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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, it has helped thousands of athletes and their families, as well as the aviation community to transport athletes to and from the Special Olympics USA Games, helping ensure a safe and successful experience.

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