



Blind Olympics gives kids a purpose

By Dennis McCarthy, columnist

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Odds and ends from around the Valley:

From 8-year-old David Sandoval of Burbank to 7-year-old Graham Kope of Valley Village and 19-year-old Joseph Hanna of Sherman Oaks, the upcoming Junior Blind Olympics is all about gaining self-confidence.

With it, who knows how high they can reach - how fast they can run?

"David isn't the most social little boy, but these games make him feel good about himself," says Maria Sandoval, David's mother.

Her son was born with microphthalmia, a rare condition that resulted in his eyes being extremely small. He is totally blind.

After four surgeries, David has prosthetic eyes but still has to have additional surgeries to perfect the implants.

"This is the one event that gives him a chance to compete and have fun like other little boys," she says. "It makes him feel happy that he has done something."

David, Graham and Joseph will be among 800 blind and visually-impaired youths and their families taking part in the Junior Blind Olympics, April 18, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Junior Blind campus, 5300 Angeles Vista Blvd., in Los Angeles.

If you can, stop by for a while and do some cheering. These kids deserve it.

For more information see www.juniorblind.org.

Academic feat: Congratulations to the five teams from St. Bernardine of Siena Catholic School in Woodland Hills that made it to the state finals of Destination Imagination - an academic decathlon for creative thinkers.

The kids competed in one of five challenges - technical design and construction, theater arts, playwriting and choreography, improvisational acting and structural engineering.

Siena was the only school in the Valley to enter the contest, which gives children with vivid imaginations - kids who make rocket ships out of toothpicks and pipe cleaners - a chance to show their stuff.

So, congrats to the five teams - Animal Crackers, Delicious and Malicious, Fantastic Four, Eureka and DI-rectors.

Happy 60th anniversary: And finally, a happy wedding anniversary to Chuck and Martha Martin of Northridge, who got married 60 years ago on their seventh date.

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"We went to Vegas, like a lot of young couples back then," says Chuck, a Marine who served in the Korean War. "Best thing I ever did, marrying Martha."

He's got a great story about leasing 150 acres from Bob Hope at the top of Balboa Boulevard near the old O'Melveny Sunshine Ranch.

"I leased it for \$45 a month for 16 years from Bob's brother, Jim, who I knew," Chuck says. "He said, 'Do anything you want with it, just don't sell it.'"

"My family literally grew up on that ranch. Every night we'd go horseback riding with the kids and their friends from the neighborhood.

"Boy, it was beautiful up there, and safe. I miss it."

There's a lot about the old Valley people miss.

Happy 60th, Martha and Chuck.

Dennis McCarthy's column appears Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday.

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