

Special Olympics Flame of Hope Arrives at Toyota Mississippi

June 10, 2015

Blue Springs, Miss., June 10, 2015 – Toyota Mississippi today celebrated Special Olympics athletes at its Blue Springs, Miss., production facility. Local athlete Justin Rosenthal, who will be competing in golf at this year's world games, participated by cheering on Toyota team members and Vice President Sean Suggs as they carried the Flame of Hope in a one-mile torch run on its way to the 2015 Special Olympics World Games.

“Being a part of the Unified Relay Across America is a truly gratifying and humbling experience,” said Suggs. “It is because of our team members’ commitment to diversity and inclusion that Toyota has strong community-based partnerships. We look forward to growing our relationship with Special Olympics and continuing to celebrate the abilities of its athletes in Northeast Mississippi.”

Today’s Mississippi ceremony is part of an ongoing celebration from Toyota as the Official Automotive Sponsor of the 2015 Special Olympics World Games, taking place in Los Angeles from July 25 to August 2. With more than 7,000 athletes, 177 represented countries and 30,000 volunteers, the 2015 Special Olympics World Games will be the largest sports and humanitarian event this year.

In addition to torch stops, Toyota dealers nationwide are supporting Special Olympics USA athletes and coaches in their journey to the Games through a fundraising program. Toyota’s Blue Springs facility added to that with a \$5,000 donation to support local programs in Northeast Mississippi.

“Toyota really stepped up to show their support for Special Olympics Mississippi and our athletes,” said Tony Bahou, President and CEO of Special Olympics Mississippi. “We are thankful for their leadership and commitment to helping develop our athletes and create communities of inclusion for our most vulnerable citizens.”

The athlete from Lee County, Mississippi, represents the state and country in the golf competition this summer, and is living his dreams to compete in the World Games.

“I had to overcome having open heart surgery, but Special Olympics has changed my life by meeting new people, going places I've never been and having experiences with my family,” said Justin Rosenthal, Special Olympics athlete competing in golf at this year’s world games. “My dad plays alternative shot with me and my family is always there to support me.”

Production Control Team Member Jennifer Mangles knows firsthand what Special Olympics means for many individual in Mississippi and across the country and was honored to be able to run in the torch relay.

“Special Olympics hits close to home for me, because I have three family members with special needs,” said Mangles. “I go to Indiana and participate in Special Olympics with my nephew every year. Running in this relay gave me another opportunity to support my family and celebrate the unique abilities each of them possesses.”

In 2014, Toyota Mississippi produced nearly 180,000 Corollas and recently produced its 500,000th Corolla, a production accomplishment that was achieved faster than any other Toyota plant in the U.S. – a testament to the 2,000 hardworking team members who have answered increasing consumer demand since the plant opened in

2011.

The Special Olympics event complements Toyota's local investment in employment, philanthropic efforts and environmental responsibility. To date, Toyota has donated more than \$700 million to non-profits across the U.S. In Mississippi, Toyota has contributed more than \$2 million to organizations, including Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Mississippi; Catch Kids, Inc.; Habitat for Humanity; Mississippi BEST Robotics; NAACP; Regional Rehabilitation Center; The Family Resource Center of Northeast Mississippi and Tree of Life Clinic.