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## N. Idaho Special Olympians leave for China

*Around 7,500 athletes will compete in variety of events in Shanghai next week*

COEUR d'ALENE -- Four North Idaho athletes will join the 400-member U.S. Special Olympics team in Shanghai, China, at the 2007 World Summer Games next week.

"These athletes come from all over Idaho and represent various sports, including golf, track and field, cycling, swimming and equestrian," said Ryan Panitz, director of communications for the organization. "We couldn't be prouder of their accomplishments and know they will shine in China."



*Special Olympics athlete Steve Mitchell, right, stands with Troy McClain, former contestant of "The Apprentice," and keynote speaker for Tuesday's Breakfast With Champions fundraiser.*

Rathdrum residents Kirk Grogan and Chad Schaff, and Coeur d'Alene residents Steve Mitchell and Tamara Topps will leave today for Boise, where they will catch their flight to China.

Grogan will compete in shot put and other track and field events, and Schaff will compete in cycling, while Mitchell and Topps will bowl for the gold. Around 7,500 athletes from more than 160 nations will compete in a variety of sporting events beginning Tuesday through Oct. 11.

Dallas Leatham, Special Olympics program information manager, said Grogan is likely to set a world record in shot put. Reuben Murray, a Special Olympian from Boise, has competed in a variety of events for many years. While he will not be attending the summer games, he was enthusiastic for his teammates. "The Special Olympics is my family," he said. "Special Olympics is my home and my heart."

Mike Sullivan, president of the Special Olympics board of directors, said the nonprofit organization met its financial goals for the first time in several years in 2006, and he believes it'll do it again this year. "We couldn't send our athletes on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity without support," Sullivan, said at the organization's annual Breakfast with Champions fundraising event Tuesday at the Best Western Coeur d'Alene Best Inn.

Troy McClain, a former contestant on "The Apprentice" and Special Olympics supporter, also spoke at the breakfast fundraiser. The athletes are not the only people who benefit from the program, he said. "What we get from these athletes is beyond the obvious," McClain said. McClain's sister is a Special Olympian with the program, and competes in Idaho. There are roughly 2,200 athletes in the program who are involved in 24 competitions every year. The youngest Special Olympics athlete is 8 years old, and the oldest is 90. Jacob Watkins, a Special Olympian from Coeur d'Alene who competes in golf, volleyball and snowshoeing, said he has enjoyed the program since he joined in 2003.