

A Special Olympic Lady: But the lady may not be the one most often cited. Anne McGlone Burke (1944-) grew up on the south side of Chicago. A self-described “awful” student, she spent much of her childhood in city parks. After one year at YMCA's George Williams College, Anne took a job as a physical education teacher for the Chicago Park District at West Pullman Park.

Chicago was a municipal pioneer offering recreational programs for people with intellectual disabilities. A \$10,000 grant in 1965, funded year-round sports classes for mentally challenged kids at ten Chicago parks. Burke volunteered to teach the classes at West Pullman Park. She recalled: “I had never even seen a retarded person. Parents wouldn't bring them to the parks, because kids would make fun of them.”

After a weeklong training session conducted by Dr. William Freeberg, Burke began teaching her new charges to ice-skate, cheerlead, and play games. She said: “I got the [able] kids in the park to be my junior counselors, so they were not making fun of [the disabled kids]. In a year, I had about 100 kids, and people were saying, ‘This is good.’ ”

Dr. Freeberg was the nation's first Ph.D. in recreation. He was chairman of the Recreation/Outdoor Education Department of Southern Illinois University and had spearheaded camping for the physically and mentally challenged since the early 1950s. He also instructed students, e.g. Anne, to learn about people with disabilities through firsthand experience.

Burke was passionate about her work with special children and came up with an idea to hold a sports meet bringing more disabled into the program so that Chicagoans could see that these children had abilities. In this role Anne would one day intersect with another Olympic Lady.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver (1921-2009) was born in Brookline, MA, graduated from Stanford in 1943 and was a social worker at the Federal Industrial Institution for Women. She moved to Chicago in 1951 to work with the House of the Good Shepherd Women's Shelter and the Chicago Juvenile Court.

Her sister Rosemary, older by three years, was born with a learning disability. Eunice was a playmate and protector to Rosemary during their childhood. There were no opportunities for people born as Rosemary. Eunice became dedicated to improving the quality of their lives. She believed that if people with intellectual disabilities were given the opportunities and experiences, they could accomplish far more than anyone ever thought possible.

In June 1962 she founded a four-week camp at her estate in suburban Washington, D.C. for 34 innercity mentally retarded campers. That July she opened a second camp. It was the first to be funded in a series of Kennedy Foundation funded day camps for children with disabilities. Eunice became a trustee of the Foundation.

After her first year, she sought advice from Dr. Freeberg and asked if he was interested in cooperating in the development of a national program in recreation and physical fitness for people with mental retardation. Freeberg, a visionary who would see his efforts revolutionize the quality of life for people with disabilities, agreed to work with the Foundation. In June 1963, she opened her camp for a second summer and Foundation camps expanded nationwide.

In 1967, the Chicago Park District wanted to increase activities for people with mental retardation. Anne, part of the team to consider the potential of such programs, was asked to put on "a show, a competition, or a track and field meet" to raise public awareness of the mental retardation recreation programs. Anne already knew there was a greatly underserved population who could benefit from additional programs and parents who needed to be shown what their children were capable of through sports and recreation.

Burke had been organizing "special" sports events for two years and suggested a track and field meet. She contacted Freeberg. He agreed, mentioned Chicago's Soldier Field as its venue, and suggested Burke contact Shriver to explain the concept and seek funding. Burke's proposal to the Foundation was to hold a one-time citywide track meet modeled after the Olympics. Burke explained the Chicago staff coined the phrase Special Olympics because we had a "special" recreation program.

Her vision was of a fun day of four clinics around the field set up for swimming, basketball, hockey, and touch football. It was to be a casual play day as well as a competition. Some wanted only competition, but that wasn't her goal. She wanted parents, volunteers, educators, and people from Chicago to understand, to touch, feel and be part of things with persons they hadn't seen participate before. A decade earlier, people with intellectual disabilities weren't even being educated, now they would be running, jumping and swimming in Soldier Field.

Eunice immediately saw the potential and asked Burke to expand its scope to include more sports and athletes from across the United States. "There was no "if." It was "when." Anne recalled. "You give Eunice "one-time," and she sees "annual." You give Eunice "citywide" and she sees "nationwide.'" Shriver had bandied about the idea of an Olympics-type project before, but no one had gotten around to executing it.

The Foundation approved Anne's plan and on March 29, 1968, at a press conference with Mayor Richard Daly, Eunice announced a grant of \$25,000 to the Park District for a

"Chicago Special Olympics" for the mentally retarded. Although the event was now launched to take place just four months away, the details were not in place. The details befell Burke.

Burke's coworkers at the Chicago Park District implemented her details in record time. Heads of departments, riggers, electricians, plumbing people, etc., suggested that what made her so effective was her dynamic personality and ability to work with others. One of them recalled, "We ended up building a pool right there in Soldier Field. To get that in there in a week or two – that was phenomenal. There probably wouldn't have been a Special Olympics without her."

With Burke's details all in place, some 1,000 special athletes from 26 U.S. states and Canada competed in track and field, floor hockey, and swimming. The Kennedy Foundation quickly incorporated the games as Special Olympics, Inc., in the District of Columbia—effectively preventing the Chicagoans from keeping their own event.

Still, July 20, 1968 in Chicago stands as nothing less than the most important single date in the history of the Special Olympics.



Burke left the Chicago Park District in 1970 and returned to school while raising her four children (three of whom are adopted). She received a bachelor's degree from De Paul University in 1976 and a law degree from Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1983. In 1987 she was the first woman appointed to serve on the Illinois Court of Claims. Justice Burke was appointed in 1995 then elected in 1996 to the Appellate Court. In 2006 she was appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court and elected to a full 10-year term in 2008.

Justice Anne McGlone Burke: A Special Olympic Lady.

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