

# Rim Special Athletes offers kayaking with the blind

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Staff Writer

The Rim Special Athletes program offers year-round individual sporting activities for those with disabilities. One of the groups that came to some of RSA's activities this summer was the Inland Empire Chapter of Lighthouse for the Blind (LftB). Several days this summer, LftB bought up some of their adult participants and enjoyed a day at Lake Arrowhead, using RSA's instructors and lake equipment. All are legally blind; some have some vision and others, through the spectrum, are totally blind.

This activity fits perfectly within both RSA's and LftB's mission statements of teaching these individuals living skills and providing recreational and social experiences they can learn to do and enjoy. The RSA program is but one activity the Lighthouse for the Blind offers to give their members experiences which help them identify strengths and interests, helping them build confidence in themselves, allowing them to gain a sense of direction and control over their lives, despite their blindness. RSA reached out to them to offer them this unique experience many had never had before.

This is similar to the goals the RSA skiing programs have, which RSA offers during the winter when snow is on the ground.

The watersports equipment owned by RSA is used over by Peninsula Park several days each week during the summer, by various groups RSA works with, including the local Mountain of Promise and RSA families, all for free. This Peninsula Park location with the beach also gives them the opportunity to swim. RSA, of course, supplies everyone with a floatation device or life vest as safety is their number one concern while they have fun. RSA never charges for their activities, which they provide year-round.

Lighthouse for the Blind brought a couple of vans of their members up the hill for a day at the lake. Many of their members had not experienced kayaks in the past and enjoyed the new experience of a "lake day," which is significantly different from a swimming pool or the ocean beach. "This was a new and enlightening experience for many of these limited sight participants this summer," said RSA President Jack Cooperman.

Their members enjoyed riding in and paddling the RSA double kayaks, sitting and paddling in the front of the kayak, with another RSA instructor riding beside in a single kayak for safety. At the lake, along with the lily pads, there was swimming and sunbathing. Quite a vacation away from the city for the LftB folks who came. After the first group came for a day, many others of their friends who heard



**Rim Special Athletes sponsored a day at the lake for participants from Lighthouse for the Blind this past summer. (Photos by Rhea-Frances Tetley)**

about the good time were asking to come up the next time.

Unfortunately, some scheduled days were canceled this summer due to the fire, but it is hoped that next year more days can be arranged for LftB to come and enjoy the freedoms the lake offers to these blind individuals. Some are already looking forward to RSA winter snowshoeing programs.

These RSA summer water programs and their winter snow programs and many other of their programs are made possible through the fundraisers such as the Great Gatsby Gala held last month and donations from local groups.

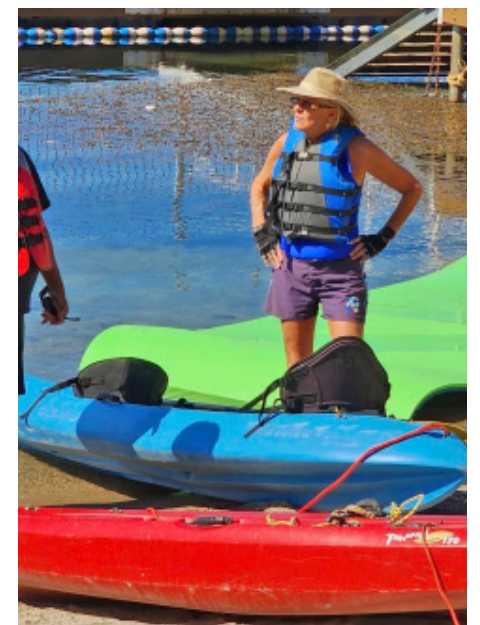
As a year-round program, RSA also has offered golfing at the Lake Arrowhead Country Club, snow skiing at Snow Valley, snowshoeing at Rim Nordic and water sports, including fishing, and year-round virtual yoga classes.

RSA usually has a float for their participants to ride in during the Jamboree Days parade in Crestline, and they usually walk or ride in the Christmas holiday parade in Blue Jay. Each activity offers a chance for socialization between the participants. Each different opportunity gives the participants a chance to learn new skills and to practice new skills as often as possible. The old adage "practice makes perfect" has truth behind it.

The Rim Special Athletes Foundation serves individuals of all ages, from 10 and above, with visual and hearing impairments, amputations, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Down Syndrome, autism, as well as many other cognitive and physical disabilities. For more information on the Rim Special Athletes Foundation, or to get involved in their activities, see their website, <https://rimspecialathletes.org>. Contact them directly by email at [RimSpecialAthletes@gmail.com](mailto:RimSpecialAthletes@gmail.com).



**RSA President Jack Cooperman helping the Lighthouse participants with their kayaks.**



**On the lily pad at Peninsula Park with RSA.**