

# Finding a way to keep adaptive sports going

By **MARY-JUSTINE LANYON**  
Editor

Last year, about 30 individuals a day were participating in the Rim of the World Special Athletes Foundation summer activities on Lake Arrowhead – swimming, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, riding on pedal boats and even having fun with squirt guns.

“We couldn’t do that this year,” Jack Cooperman told his fellow members of the Mountain Sunrise Rotary Club.

Because of the COVID-19 restrictions and regulations, Cooperman had to find a way to serve his special athletes.

“We did a singular program without any volunteers and only one family at a time,” he said. Some days he would have one family in the morning, another in the afternoon. Quite often, Cooperman said, the mother and father of the participant would come.

“It was hard for them not to see their friends but it got them very close with their families,” he said.

One 15-year-old, who is in a wheelchair, was transported to the dock by the Arrowhead Lake Association lake safety patrol commander. The boy, Cooperman said, convinced the commander he was capable of driving the pontoon boat “and only talked about it for a week and a half!”

They did a lot of sanitation, Cooperman noted. Temperatures were taken, masks



**Jack Cooperman told his fellow Rotarians about how Rim Special Athletes has had to adapt under COVID-19 regulations.**

(Photo by Mary-Justine Lanyon)

were worn when in close proximity.

At the dock Rim Special Athletes has been allowed to use they have about 12 kayaks, four stand-up paddle boards, two pedal boats and a water bike.

“We’re set next year to take on 50 students at a time if conditions allow it,” Cooperman said.

The purpose of the Foundation, according to its website, “is to provide a recreational experience that is safe and positive for adaptive individuals. It provides year-round activities for adaptive athletes, serving veterans and individuals from our mountain communities and beyond.

“Rim Special Athletes are individuals with visual and hearing impairments, ampu-



**Kayaking on Lake Arrowhead is a popular activity with the special athletes.**

(Courtesy of Jack Cooperman)

tations, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Down Syndrome, autism, as well as many other cognitive and physical disabilities.”

In addition to the water activities, the other summer activities have included golf and yoga. They did have a few limited sessions of golf, Cooperman said. Yoga, which had been taking place at the Lake Arrowhead Community Presbyterian Church, moved to a Zoom platform.

“We’ve had a little over 1,000 participants in yoga lessons, three days a week,” Cooperman said. A couple of people in Northern California and Oregon have logged on as well as members of Disabled Sports Eastern Sierras.

Now Cooperman is focused on how to deal with the adaptive situation this winter. Rim Special Athletes has partnered with the western division of the Professional Ski Instructors of America and will have eight adaptive Zoom lessons that are going out nationwide every other week.

“We’re still figuring out what we can and can’t do at Snow Valley this year,” Cooperman noted. The stand-up

skiers will be able to keep proper social distancing and wear masks. The issue that has him most worried are the individuals he and the other instructors put into sit skis. “That puts us extremely close to them, face to face. We’re still working on how to resolve that.”

The youngest skier Cooperman has worked with was 2 years old. The oldest, 89-year-old Carl Blank of Twin Peaks. “Carl has macular degeneration. He can focus if I stay within five to eight feet in front of him, wearing an orange vest.”

With some skiers, Cooperman uses radios in their helmets. They divide the mountain up into zones and let the skier know which zone they’re in. And they have a key word that means to stop immediately.

Rim Special Athletes has held a fundraising event the past couple of years at Snow Valley. Unfortunately, they can’t hold it this year. “We’ll be hurting with funding,” Cooperman said.

“We’ve never charged for a lesson and we don’t plan to,” he noted.

Folks can make donations through the website: [www.rimsspecialathletes.org](http://www.rimsspecialathletes.org).



**Pedal power propels these athletes across the lake.**

(Courtesy of Jack Cooperman)