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City begins Olympic Day tradition



Chad Reazor takes flight during the skateboard open jam portion of Olympic Day.

/Photo by Don Thomas II (Instagram @shyaboutmyart)

By Michael Castello

Irving—Irving presented its inaugural Olympic Day celebration June 25 - 27. Olympic Day is a worldwide annual event, which gives people opportunities to participate in sports regardless of age, gender, or athletic ability.

The Irving celebration, the only Olympic Day event in North Texas, offered several chances for youth and adults to participate in or watch a variety of Olympic sports. The weekend also included presentations and performances highlighting the art and culture of Japan, the host country for this summer's Olympic Games.

The games officially started on Thursday with a special opening ceremony. The torch was lit by Ray Cerda, an Irving native. Cerda was an Olympic Torch Bearer for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, taking the

honor when the torch passed through Irving at Heritage Park on its way to Los Angeles. Ray was a para-athlete at the University of Texas-Austin and worked for 25 years in the Irving Parks and Recreation Department.

“Olympic Day is all about sports, quality of life, and getting all the kids involved in as many activities as possible,” Cerda said.

Olympic Day was hosted and organized by the United

States-Mexico Cultural and Educational Foundation in partnership with 14 local entities.

“Have fun, get outdoors, and enjoy yourself in an event,” City Councilman Albert Zapanta said. “You’re not going to be in Tokyo, but you’re going to be part of an Olympic activity.”

Lively Skate Park hosted skateboarding on Friday night.

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“Skateboarding is brand new to the Olympics,” said Joe Lopez, coordinator of Olympic Day. “This definitely is a community celebration. Olympic Day by design is meant to bring the community out under the joy of sport. Through friendly competition or healthy lifestyles and activity, this is what the Olympics, at the core, represent.”

“These aren’t competitive events at Olympic Day; instead this is about getting out, and getting active. It’s just a great community celebration at its core.”

“For Olympic Day here in 2021, we have nine different venues, over 14 different ac-

tivities. There is something for everyone, whether it’s the 5k, the 10k, the family walk and run, a water polo exhibition, or the skate park. We have archery and bocce ball. We have three tournaments: basketball, volleyball, and table tennis. Again, not competitive tournaments, but to help promote the ideals of athletic sportsmanship between two teams. If you want to spectate and cheer on a friend, or you want to learn about a new sport, it’s here.

“The three pillars of Olympic Day are move, learn, discover,” Lopez said. “You may learn about a new activity or a new skill or maybe something about yourself through just the



IPD Officer Charlie Cavazos helps a young sportsman learn the ancient art of archery. / Photo provided by Irving Police Department.

discovery of these activities. It’s pretty fun.”

This was Irving’s first Olympic Day, but it will not be the last.

“2022 is on the table,” Lopez said. “This was our inaugural event, but the city leadership is behind this. I guarantee you there’s something in 2022.”

The skateboard open jam offered a competition without formal scoring or standings, where skaters did their thing with extra motivation and community. Over the speakers, emcee Austin McKillip from The Point Skate Shop said things like, “Next sick trick that goes down gets this pair of wheels,” or a deck, or stickers, or something else.

“Come to see rad skateboarding from some of the best skateboarders in DFW,” McKillip said. “If you want to skate yourself: win some product or a little bit of cash. Or just have a high-energy, good time event. People try their best tricks and commit to them here.”

“Cities like Irving are super down for [skateboarding events]. It’s not bad. It’s not evil. Just sick skating, people throwing themselves down stair sets and stuff. When they make it, you get hype with them. With skating, you watch someone do something clean with style, and you can see it.”

Saturday was Field Day, which featured archery, bocce ball, and a soccer demonstration from the Dallas Sidekicks.

The Irving Police Athletic

League hosted the archery.

“This is the type of sport that anybody can pick up,” Chelsey Jones, instructor and lead coordinator of IPAL’s archery, said. “Anybody can excel and be good at it. Everyone walks away smiling and feeling good about shooting arrows. It’s all about picking up something new, being able to get better at it. Once you start hitting those bullseyes, you just want to keep doing it and doing it.”

Irving Police Athletic League’s boxing was the only Olympic Day event that was truly competitive. The weekend coincided with the 2021 Texas State Silver Gloves Tournament, which IPAL hosted. The Silver Gloves is a state qualifying tournament for boxers ages 8-16. Winners advance to compete at regionals in Searcy, Arkansas, and that tournament sends winners to the national championships in Missouri.

Rosario Solis, director of IPAL, says they typically send about 5-6 competitors to regionals each year, and have winners all the time. Though there is not an exact figure, IPAL national champions are not uncommon. The entire gym is adorned with shelves full of trophies and medals.

“We just had some of our kids go to the Junior Olympics, which is a really big deal,” Don Bolke, who’s worked with IPAL since it opened in 1992, said. “If you win a championship there, you’re on a path to the