

## Montana Trooper

# 2012 International Law Enforcement Torch Run Conference

*By Sergeant Art Collins, AMT President*

Earlier this past summer, I received an e-mail from Special Olympics/Law Enforcement Torch Run coordinator Terri Sappington inviting me to attend the International Law Enforcement Torch Run Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. My response was an unenthusiastic, "Sure, I'd be happy to." Little did I know at the time what a gift she had just offered me. Don't get me wrong, I think the Law Enforcement Torch Run is a great organization and one I have enjoyed being a part of for the past four years. However, as most of you know, I have been the AMT President for the past five years, and I've been to more conferences than I can easily remember. Quite honestly, I was "conferenced out".

A short time later, Terri sent another e-mail asking if I would be willing to serve as an escort for the "Miner's Lamp". This time out of a sense of duty and wanting to "earn my keep," I agreed to serve in any way I could during this convention. Again, I had no idea the gift she had just offered.

Fast forward to November, we are about to leave for the conference, and I am still no more enthusiastic about it than when I was first asked. On the morning of November 7th, eighteen Montanans departed from all over the state enroute to Indianapolis. Fourteen of us met up at our connection in Minneapolis. From there, we spent nearly every waking hour together for the next four days.

Upon arrival in Indianapolis, I managed to get myself checked into my room and registered for the conference, at which time I was told to be at a meeting for Miner's Lamp escorts at 1600 hours. Being the dutiful soldier you all know

me to be, I arrived at my briefing ahead of time, ready to be told what was next. This being the day before the conference, "hurry up and wait" was of course the order of the day. No problem, after nearly thirty years of service between the military and the Highway Patrol, I was used to that.

Eventually, those of us waiting were given the briefing we had assembled for. For me, it was also a chance to learn what the Miner's Lamp is and what it represents. As members of the Torch Run movement, we have taken on the responsibility to be the Guardians of the Flame. The Miner's Lamp reminds us of this responsibility, as well as those who have passed before us who have guarded the same flame of hope. I was assigned to be an escort during the Honors Luncheon on Friday afternoon. This was a dual role, because there would also be a Ceremony of Remembrance to pay

our respects to the LETR members that have passed away over the past year. I thought, "Okay, that is pretty cool." They were starting to get my attention.

That night, we attended a comedy night show at Cracker Comedy Club. The featured comedian was Scott Long of Indianapolis. Scott is a professional comedian who also just happens to have a daughter that is a Special Olympics athlete. While some of his performance was adult in nature, he also spent a good amount of time shar-

ing with us in a humorous way just what it is like to have a child with special needs. He talked about the damage and hurt caused when people use the "R" word in all its different forms. He also talked about how these people with special needs and specifically his daughter want nothing more than to be treated kindly, respectfully, and with dignity. If you will do this, they will be your friend for life with "no guile".

*more* ➤



*Team Montana on November 9th after the Honors Luncheon. Front row, left to right: Matt Brewer, Tina Hoeger, Morgan Kasuske, Isaac Baldry, and Jack Allen holding his Un-Sung Hero Award he received that day. Middle row, left to right: Terri Sappington, Lesley Lukens, Chris Zier, Theresa Baldry, and Jean Allen. Back row, left to right: Domingo Leveque-Zapata, Peggy Ash, Doug Sappington, Candy Zier, Lisa Hunter, Art Collins, Judy Gephart, and Jason Johnson.*

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The last part about no guile struck me. A lot of us in law enforcement have, for some very good reason, become cynical of most everything we see and hear from people. We are nearly always wondering about the motivations and agendas of other people. I thought how wonderful it must be to be friends with someone that is simply motivated by nothing more than a desire to be your friend, someone that is incapable of guile. That was the reason for the first lump in my throat for the week.

The next morning was the opening ceremony and address by the Chairman and CEO of Special Olympics, Mr. Tim Shriver (yes, of the Kennedy/Shriver family). Two things in particular struck me about his presentation.

The first was his message about what he called a "Dignity Revolution". Quite simply, we all deserve to be treated with respect and human dignity, regardless of our race, color, creed, ethnicity, sex,

sexual orientation, and finally, intellectual ability or cognitive differences. One of the first steps in this revolution is the eradication of the "R" word. It has no place or reason to exist in our vocabulary. This word does nothing but display our own ignorance and show a complete disrespect for an entire group of people.

The second thing that I was particularly impressed with was a story that Mr. Shriver told about Montana's own Dave Hedley. He told the crowd of over 1,000 people how Dave, while

fighting leukemia and being weak of body, demonstrated his strong spirit by driving himself to the opening ceremonies for the summer games last year so he could be part of the Circle of Honor one last time. As some of you

didn't take long to realize, we were not there for the athletes, they were there for us. I heard Hall of Fame Major League Pitcher Carl Erskine tell us how his own son, born with Down syndrome, changed his life. I was honored to congratulate our own Montana LETR Director Jack Allen after receiving one of three John Carion "Unsung Hero" awards this year. I also witnessed about a million smiles and more than a few tears of joy.

At the beginning of this story, I mentioned how Terri Sappington had offered me a gift I wasn't aware of. For the past few months, I had been re-evaluating my career and what was to come next. I am nearly at the point that I can take a retirement and look for gainful employment with another agency or get out of law enforcement all together. The gift that Terri unknowingly offered me and I received at the conference was a reason to continue with my law enforcement career. I know I can continue to work with the Special Olympics and the Law Enforcement Torch Run as a civilian, but I just can't imagine how it could be as good.

For those of you that have read my story to this point, you are probably saying to yourself, "Geez Art, it sounds like you had some kind of religious experience." My answer to that would be, "No, just a human experience," and one that I would highly recommend.

If you would like to learn more about the Law Enforcement Torch Run or Special Olympics and how you can get involved, log on to [www.SOMT.org](http://www.SOMT.org) □



Isaac Baldry (seated), Chris Zier, and Art (Sgt. Spike) Collins in the back, all dressed up in our Sunday best for the Closing Ceremony and formal banquet on November 10th.

already know, Dave succumbed to the leukemia in September. What I took away from this was just how much a family this Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics really is.

For the next couple of days, I spent my time going from break out session to break out session, shaking hands, hugging, and visiting with Special Olympics athletes from all over the world. I witnessed different agencies of law enforcement men and women working together, laughing together, and getting their batteries recharged from the athletes. It