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[Home](#) > [Lifestyles](#)> [Culpeper News](#)

Special skills required



Photo by Vincent Vala

Special Olympians Clarence Campbell, 43, and Shannon Jackson, 33, of Culpeper are headed to Nebraska to compete in the 2010 Special Olympics National Games July 18-23. They will participate in the bocce tournament.

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Two of the 33 Virginia athletes headed to Nebraska next week to compete in the second annual Special Olympics USA National Games are from Culpeper.

Clarence Campbell, 43, and Shannon Jackson, 33, will compete in the bocce tournament. The Culpeper couple plans to leave for the cornhusker state this Friday.

The six-day competition will be held at the University of Nebraska and several nearby venues July 18-23.

“I’m looking forward to having fun,” said Jackson, a 1995 Culpeper County High School graduate.

About 2,800 Special Olympics athletes will participate in 13 sporting events. They are: aquatics, basketball, bocce, bowling, flag football, golf, rhythmic gymnastics, power lifting, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field and volleyball.

For a chance to take part in the National Games, athletes must earn gold in their sport during the 2009 state-level Special Olympics competition. Campbell and Jackson competed in bocce during the state

championships in Virginia Beach last November.

Inspired by the Egyptians, Romans and the Greeks, this ancient game is similar to bowling and requires the use of both physical and logical skills. The object of the game is to roll a larger ball closer than your opponent's to the targeted smaller ball.

To qualify for the Special Olympics, athletes must be at least 8 years old or older with an intellectual or development disability or cognitive delay. Campbell and Jackson have learning disabilities.

Kathleen Hales, a program manager for outpatient and mental health for the Rappahannock-Rapidan Community Services Board in Culpeper, met Campbell and Jackson through work and now volunteers as their local bocce coach.

"Clarence and Shannon are just amazing," she said Wednesday. "They are just a joy to work with."

Hales added that Campbell and Jackson started playing bocce about three years ago.

Coach Ken Massey will lead the Special Olympics Team Virginia in Nebraska.

"Team Virginia 2010 is a wonderful mix of athletes; adults and young people; veterans and rookies," said Rick Jeffrey, Special Olympics Virginia president. "They will return from Nebraska more responsible citizens, better equipped for a productive and rewarding life; and Nebraska will be bettered by their presence."

When the Culpeper couple isn't training for the Special Olympics, Campbell and Jackson work at Didlake, a Manassas-based company that provides employment, training and rehabilitative services for people with disabilities.

Campbell and Jackson work at the Opal location on Marsh Road. They are responsible for administering the items found inside the vending machine at car washes. For instance, they fill plastic bottles with flavored air fresheners and package quick dry towels.

Jackson is an undefeated bocce champion at the state-level fall championships and is looking forward to continuing her winning streak during Nationals.

Her mother, Imogene Jackson, said her daughter likes to skate and have fun.

"She stays on the go," Imogene Jackson said of her oldest daughter of two.

Inspired by basketball legend Michael Jordan, Campbell can't wait to compete.

"It's going to be a fun time," he said with excitement.

They are raising money to help fund the trip. Visit firstgiving.com/shannonjackson3 or firstgiving.com/clarencecampbell to donate.

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