Over 250 athletes and volunteers expected at Yom Sport in Newton

By Cindy Cantrell | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | AUGUST 11, 2013

A photo of Team 6 taken by Howie Hecht during last year's Yom Sport event in Newton.

POWER OF SPORTS: Howie Hecht of Brookline was hooked the very first time he volunteered at Yom Sport, a daylong event for adults with physical and mental disabilities that takes place every August in Newton. His responsibilities have increased over the past 10 years, he said, but the reward has remained every bit worthwhile.

“It’s a really amazing day,” Hecht said, “just incredibly heart-warming.”

Open to all faiths, Yom Sport was founded 18 years ago by the agencies of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies. According to Needham resident Jan Klein, executive chairwoman of Yom Sport, the goal is to exceed last year’s tally of 165 athletes, plus 100 volunteers who help with parking and registration, assist individual athletes, serve as team and event leaders, hand out water, and act as cheerleaders.

Hecht, who takes photos as a side business to his full-time entrepreneurial product management job for high-tech start-ups, volunteered to take photographs at his first Yom Sport, in 2004. Two years later, he was invited to serve on the Yom Sport Executive Committee, to which he suggested presenting a team photo as a keepsake to every athlete (they also receive a T-shirt, certificate of participation, and at least two medals).

The idea proved so popular that a photo station was incorporated into the official rotation in 2010. Since then, additional photographers and volunteers have assisted him in keeping up to eight photo printers continually running in order to produce hundreds of prints during the event, with supplies discounted and donated by Newtonville Camera, and Lucite frames donated by Malden International Designs. In addition, hundreds of candid photographs are posted every year on an online gallery.

“It takes a lot of coordination and hard work, but being able to capture the athletes’ excitement in this way feels really good,” said Hecht, noting that returning athletes bring their medals and photos from previous years as an alumni status symbol. “Seeing their joy is what keeps me coming back.”

The registration deadline has been extended to Wednesday for this year’s event, which will take place next Sunday (with a rain date of Aug. 25) starting at 11 a.m. on the Jewish Community Center field, 333 Nahanton St. in Newton. For more information, visit www.yomsport.org.