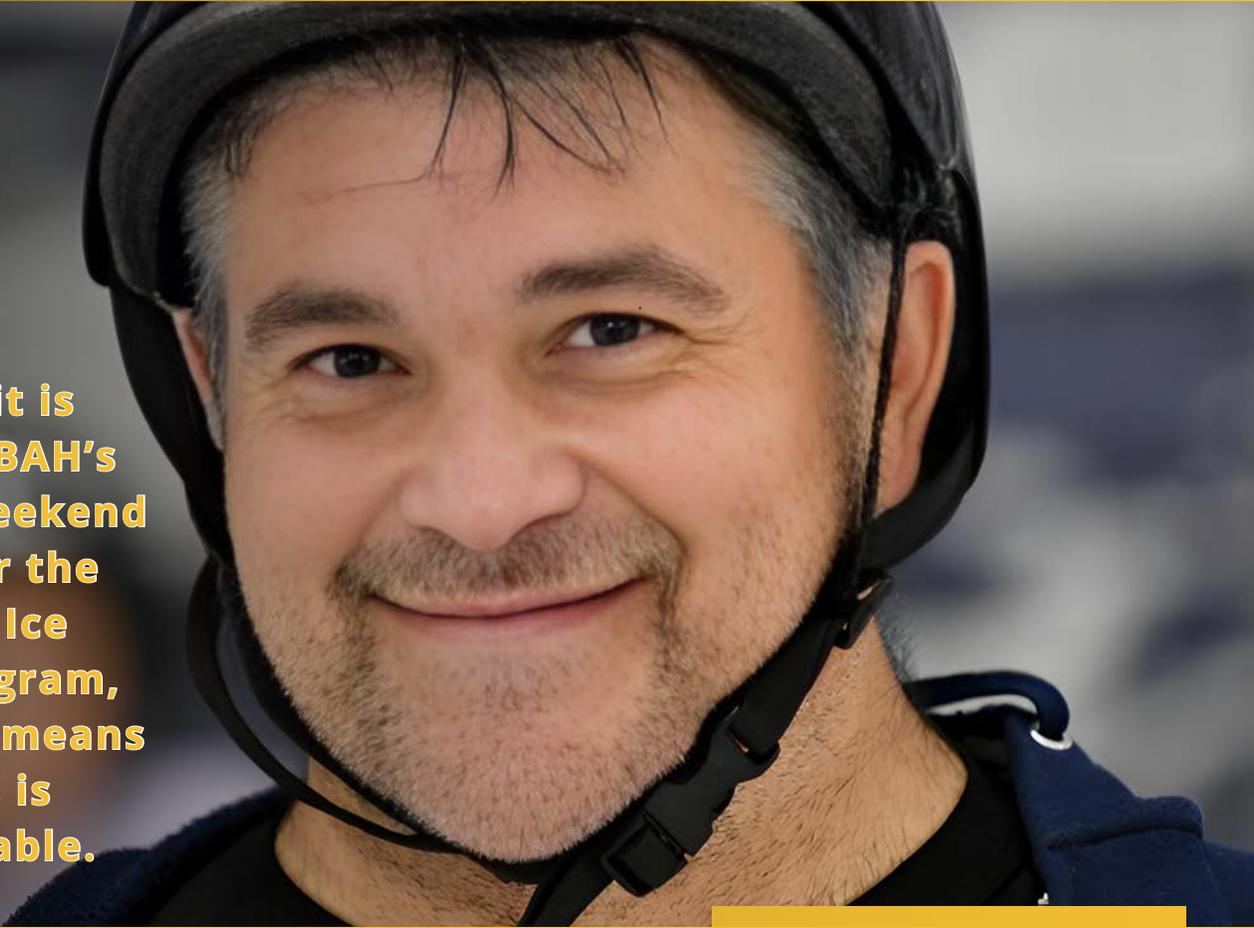


SPIRITED ATHLETES

# SABAH

BOLD AT HEART

ISSUE: SPRING, 2024



**Whether it is through SABAH's Evening & Weekend program or the Adaptive Ice Hockey program, what SABAH means to James is immeasurable.**

At 52 years of age, James is currently in his 21st year with SABAH. Like many of SABAH's adult participants, James is fortunate to have a dedicated staff of Direct Service Professionals to bring him to both the Evening and Weekend program at Niagara University and the Adaptive Ice Hockey program at the Bud Bakewell Riverside Rink.

***And, when you see James smile and laugh on the ice, you only begin to realize how much SABAH means to him. Because no one loves skating or, most especially, ice hockey, more than James.***

Thank you for your support of James, as well as over 650 SABAH athletes challenged by disability.

*Read more about James on this inside cover of this newsletter.*

## IN THIS ISSUE

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Information

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2024 Award Winners

SABAH's 2024 Starlight Night  
Auction & Gala



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SHEILA O'BRIEN

This has been an extraordinary year. As our numbers continue to return to pre-pandemic levels, we have also enjoyed the opportunity to meet many new participants throughout the past year. All seven of SABAH's programs; on ice, turf, and in New York State Parks; continue to provide adaptive recreation for hundreds of individuals from the Western New York community challenged by disability. While these programs continue to gain momentum, the Adaptive Ice Hockey program, in particular, reached record high participation levels this year.

SABAH is also overwhelmingly grateful for the strong support of the community. As we prepare for our season-ending Celebration on Ice show, we always take the time to reflect upon the incredible support we have received over the course of the year. Most notably, the large number of passionate and dedicated volunteers that serve our organization always amazes me. Each year, hundreds of volunteers faithfully attend weekly SABAH sessions to provide volunteer support and friendship for our athletes. And, they do it with such dedication and joy that it permeates every aspect of our organization. On the inside pages of this newsletter, you will have the opportunity to learn more about our Volunteer of the Year, Kristin Brown, and our Gary George, Jr. Unsung Hero, Rosie Boyka. We think you will be in awe of these two young women. But also, behind these two superstar volunteers, there are hundreds of SABAH volunteers who share their selfless commitment to improving the lives of SABAH athletes.

SABAH is also deeply indebted to those of you who continue to share your financial support with our organization. Your contributions allow us to offer our programs either free or with participation fees that fall far below the costs of programming. On behalf of those we serve, thank you for your incredible generosity.

At this time of year, we are most especially grateful to our Celebration on Ice Spotlight Sponsor, Wegmans, as they have, again, committed to sponsoring the season-ending show on March 28, 2024 at the Buffalo Convention Center. As our Spotlight Sponsor, Wegmans allows us to celebrate the achievements of our athletes with a dazzling movie premiere that will demonstrate the vast gains they have made since the beginning of the season.

And, finally, thank you to all of you who have supported our athletes, in some way, over the past year. We believe that by partnering together, we can improve outcomes for those in the community challenged by disability. We couldn't do it without you!

It's hard to fully express what SABAH means to James. At 52, he's possibly the most enthusiastic hockey player in SABAH's Adaptive ice Hockey program. James loves sports and skating, but James LOVES ice hockey.

While many older adults challenged by disability have few advocates, James is fortunate to have Direct Support Professionals in his life who truly understand how important SABAH's programs are to him, as well as some of his other housemates. They routinely make sure he is at SABAH's Wednesday Evening program at Niagara University and the Adaptive Ice Hockey program at the Bud Bakewell Rink on Tuesday evenings.

## THE ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM OF JAMES EVANS

And, while many adults with disability become sedentary and isolated, James is active and physically stronger because of SABAH. "Physical fitness and socialization go hand in hand at SABAH," states SABAH's Executive Director Sheila O'Brien. "James loves sports. But he is also here because he is having fun and making friends. And, that fills a vast need for those in the community challenged by disability."

There's no mistaking how much fun James is having when he is at SABAH. James' smile makes everyone else smile. And, James' trademark greeting of "You crazy!" has become synonymous with "Hello!" when he is met by friends at SABAH. James brings incredible joy to those around him and we are grateful that he is an important part of our programs. Thank you for your support of James, as well as all of SABAH's athletes. You make it possible!





# SABAH'S 2024 Skate-A-Thon

It's one of our favorite events of the year... and this year's event was more fun than ever! Because of the generosity of the Buffalo Sabres, SABAH athletes had the thrilling opportunity to get autographs, take photos, and skate with some of our favorite Buffalo Sabres including Ryan Johnson, JJ Peterka, and Jack Quinn... and Sabretooth!



Congratulations to our 2024 Skate-A-Thon winners:

1st place, **Meghan Richardson**; 2nd place, **Matthew Bressette**; 3rd place, **McKenzie Burt**

## SABAH'S 2024 CELEBRATION ON ICE JUKEBOX JAM

*a movie premiere celebrating the remarkable achievements of SABAH athletes challenged by disability.*

**MARCH 28, 2024, 6:00 P.M., (DOORS OPEN AT 5:30 PM.), BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER**

It was a wildly fun celebration last year... and, this year, we plan to double the fun! SABAH's 2024 Celebration on Ice will be a *two-part season-ending celebration* that will include a very special "filming day" performance at each rink, as well as the eagerly anticipated movie premiere of Jukebox Jam at the Buffalo Convention Center.

### FILMING DAY SCHEDULE

**Saturday, March 9, 2024**  
Hamburg Town Rink  
Groups 1 and 2

**Sunday, March 10, 2024**  
Northtown Center at Amherst  
Groups 1 and 3

**Monday, March 11, 2024**  
Bud Bakewell Riverside Rink  
School Day Program\*

**Tuesday, March 12, 2024**  
Bud Bakewell Riverside Rink  
School Day Program\*

10:00 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.

11:30 a.m. - 12:50 p.m.

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

**Tuesday, March 12, 2024**  
Bud Bakewell Riverside Rink  
Groups 1 and 3

**Wednesday, March 13, 2024**  
Bud Bakewell Riverside Rink  
School Day Program\*

**Wednesday, March 13, 2024**  
Niagara University Dwyer Arena  
Groups 1 and 3

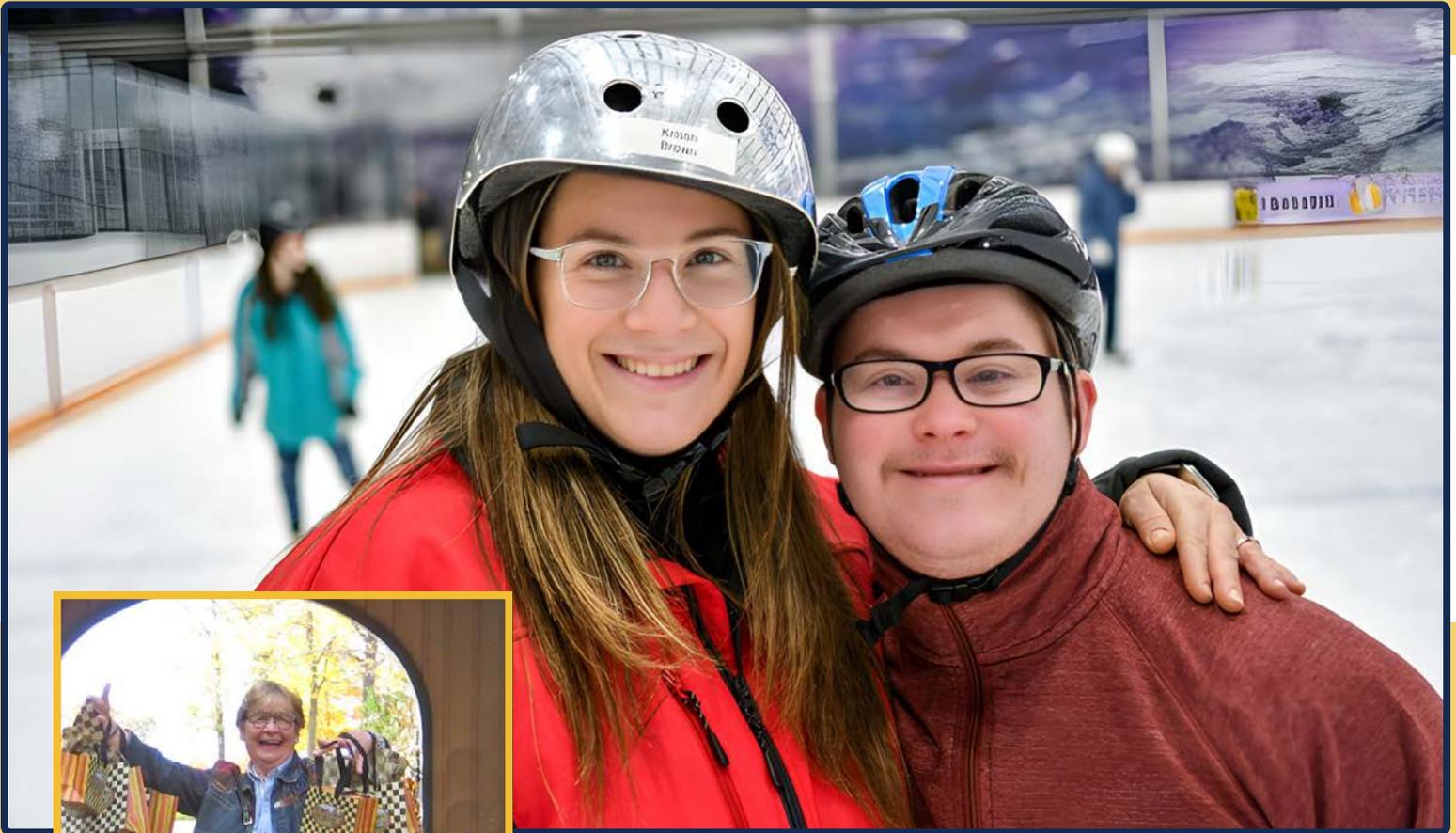
4:30 p.m. - 5:20 p.m.

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

6:30 p.m. - 7:20 p.m.

*\*School Day Programs: Please see your teacher for Filming Day Schedule*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION: [WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE)**



## The Barbara Ann Willhoff Volunteer of the Year

**KRISTIN BROWN**

The Barbara Ann Willhoff Award is named after one of SABAH's most beloved volunteers. Barbara Ann brought endless joy, encouragement, and confidence to both SABAH athletes and volunteers alike. This award serves as a lasting legacy to Barbara Ann, as well as an inspiration to all of us to love and serve each other in the same way she loved us.

Kristin is everything a volunteer should be... actually she's beyond that...she is the dream volunteer. She is, first and foremost, incredibly reliable. She's always there. If SABAH is on the schedule, Kristin is nearly guaranteed to be there to assist in some capacity. And, she will likely be there early to help set up or stay late to help clean up. At the end of an event, Kristin is typically the one who is walking out to the parking lot with the staff, as she is often the last one who stays to put equipment away or to clean up. Secondly, it's nearly impossible to label Kristin with a role, as she does just about anything for SABAH. Not only is she one of our most experienced on-ice volunteers at multiple locations and in multiple programs, but she also serves SABAH off the ice by offering her support for anything we need during our fundraising or special events; such as selling raffle tickets, checking in guests, taking photos, or shuttling gifts or equipment following an event.

Most importantly, Kristin adds tremendous joy to everything she touches. Our athletes, even the most reticent ones, instantly light up when Kristin is around. Our photo pages are filled with our athletes hugging her, dancing with her, smiling at her, and just wanting to be close to her. And, she has been a part of most of their lives for as long as they can remember, as she began volunteering with SABAH in 2006 and became an instructor shortly after in 2008.

Over and over again, Kristin reflects the joyful spirit of the award's namesake, Barbara Ann Willhoff. "The lasting legacy of Barbara was to love and serve each other the way she loved us," states SABAH's Executive Director Sheila O'Brien. "And, that's a nearly impossible standard to live up to, as Barbara had the most incredible way of making everyone feel so deeply loved and appreciated. But, Kristin fulfills that legacy. Like Barbara, she brings endless joy, encouragement, and confidence to both our athletes and volunteers, alike. She is the perfect honoree for this award." On behalf of the entire organization, SABAH is pleased to honor Kristin Brown as the 2024 Barbara Ann Willhoff Volunteer of the Year.

# The Emily Hermance Spirit Award



SABAH's Emily Hermance Spirit Award is presented to the SABAH athlete who exhibits a spirit of enthusiasm and determination in spite of challenges. This special award honors one athlete who best exemplifies the courageous and optimistic spirit of the award's namesake.



Determination is deeply ingrained in the heart of SABAH athlete, Mikayla Forsey. Although blind, Mikayla is simply unstoppable. She is an artist, athlete, student, volunteer, friend, daughter, and more. Her talented artwork was recently featured on the cover of *Pathways Through the Dark*, an anthology that highlights artists impacted by visual impairments. In addition to skating with SABAH, she is also well known for her many other talents including piano, karate, Zumba, yoga, cooking, skiing, and beeper baseball.

## MIKAYLA FORSEY

Mikayla is, without a doubt, an inspirational model of perseverance and optimism. She also happens to be genuinely kind and thoughtful to everyone around her. "Mikayla is both tender and fierce," states SABAH's Executive

Director Sheila O'Brien. "On the one hand, she is incredibly kind and soft-spoken. But then, there is also this overwhelming spirit of determination and fortitude that makes Mikayla completely unstoppable. There's nothing she can't do. And, she proves that over and over again. She is an inspiration to all of us."

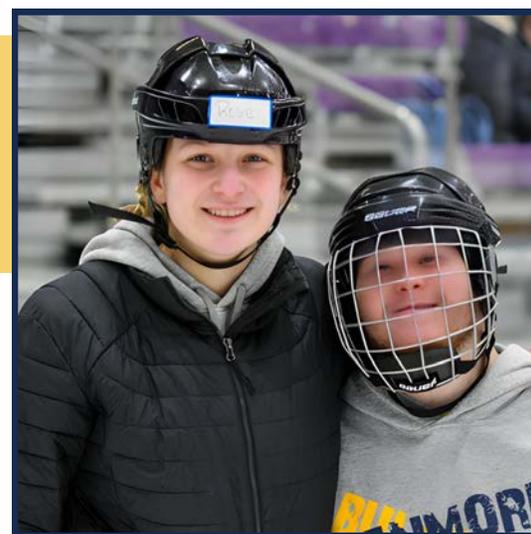
A SABAH athlete since 2018, Mikayla continues to demonstrate the spirit of enthusiasm and determination of Emily Hermance. On behalf of the entire organization, we are pleased to award Mikayla Forsey with the 2024 Emily Hermance Spirit Award.

# The Gary George, Jr. Unsung Hero Award



Gary George, Jr. was the epitome of quiet strength and compassion. His ability to be there for our SABAH athletes and do what was needed, while drawing no attention to himself, was what made Gary an unsung hero. This award, named in his honor, is given to the SABAH volunteer who exhibits the same qualities that made Gary so special to all who knew him.

Rosie Boyka began making an impact on SABAH from the first day she began volunteering at the Niagara University Evening program over three years ago. The first thing you notice about Rosie is that she exudes warmth and kindness to everyone around her. But the second thing you notice about Rosie is that she approaches volunteering from the perspective of an athlete and former hockey player. Rosie is energetic and compassionate, making each session fun for our athletes. But she also understands that each session is an opportunity for our athletes to grow stronger and more capable. Executive Director Sheila, O'Brien notes, "Rosie has a remarkable capacity to work with our participants with great patience, but she also has the mentality of an athlete who wants to make sure each session is productive. She makes sure each of our athletes sets high goals and works to reach them."



## Rosie Boyka

Rosie has such great confidence in our athletes, that it inspires them to believe in themselves, as well. Over and over again, when Rosie works with a SABAH athlete, you can watch them make incredible progress. She's not content to let them stay where they are. When Rosie is working with an athlete, it's equal parts fun and business in the very best way.

Rosie continues to be a dedicated volunteer for both our Evening and Weekend programs and the Adaptive Ice Hockey program. She is the perfect example of the spirit of Gary George, Jr., as she demonstrates the quiet strength and compassion which made him a true unsung hero. SABAH is pleased to honor Rosie Boyka as the 2024 Gary George, Jr. Unsung Hero.

## OUR MISSION

SABAH, a 501(c)(3) organization is dedicated to the mission of enriching the quality of life for individuals challenged by physical, cognitive, and/or emotional disability by providing education and therapeutic recreation, promoting fitness, and developing social and communication skills.

## OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Al Vaughters**

*Thank you for your support!*

Tax deductible donations can be mailed to SABAH at the following address:

SABAH  
2607 Niagara Street  
Buffalo, New York 14207

or online at:  
[www.sabahinc.org/donate](http://www.sabahinc.org/donate)

## SABAH'S 2023 HALL OF FAME



**KRISTEN MRUK**

Northtown Center at Amherst, and many other events and program opportunities to support SABAH.

During the video announcement, Kristen's fellow volunteer and longtime friend, Kristin Brown, was quoted, "Kristen is always willing to give a little extra to make sure on-ice sessions run smoothly and..no matter how crazy it is...she always does it with a huge smile on her face."

Kristen was also honored by Executive Director, Sheila O'Brien, as being a volunteer who connects with all our athletes in a way that makes them want to do their very best for her. "Kristen cares deeply for all our athletes and they become quickly aware of the fact that she wants them to be as strong and capable as they can possibly be. Once they see that, they want to give her their very best effort."

Kristen has also been a faithful supporter of SABAH through her role as an advocate for the organization, as well as through her volunteer support of SABAH's fundraising efforts.

## SABAH'S 2023

*Summer Skates*

SABAH'S SUMMER SKATES OFFER AN ADAPTIVE ICE SKATING PROGRAM DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS FOR ANY INDIVIDUAL, OF ANY AGE, CHALLENGED BY DISABILITY. THE 2024 PROGRAM WILL INCLUDE SIX SESSIONS AT THE BUD BAKEWELL RIVERSIDE RINK IN BUFFALO ON THE FOLLOWING DATES:

TUESDAYS - 5:30-6:20 PM  
BUD BAKEWELL RIVERSIDE RINK

JULY 9, 2024  
JULY 16, 2024  
JULY 23, 2024  
JULY 30, 2024  
AUGUST 6, 2024  
AUGUST 13, 2024

THE COST FOR THE SUMMER SEASON IS \$60 FOR ALL SIX SESSIONS. PARTICIPANTS MUST BE REGISTERED BY JULY 2, 2024 TO PARTICIPATE.

[WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/SUMMERSKATES](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/SUMMERSKATES)

SABAH's 2023 Starlight Night Auction and Gala featured the surprise announcement of SABAH's 2023 Hall of Fame inductee, Kristen Mruk. Kristen began volunteering for SABAH in 1998, when she was just 10 years old to support her older sister, Katie. Since that time, Kristen has been a steadfast advocate, volunteer, and instructor for SABAH. She continues to serve in many roles for the organization by volunteering for fundraising events, on-ice sessions at the

## UPCOMING DATES:

### FILMING DAY DATES:

MARCH 9, 2024 - MARCH 13, 2024 - VISIT [WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE) FOR INDIVIDUAL RINK INFORMATION

### 2024 CELEBRATION ON ICE MOVIE PREMIERE

MARCH 28, 2024,  
BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER  
PURCHASE TICKETS NOW AT  
[WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE)

### KICKSTOCK:

TBD - PLEASE VISIT  
[WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/KICKSTOCK](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/KICKSTOCK) FOR UPDATES

### SUMMER SKATES:

BEGIN ON JULY 9, 2024  
DEADLINE TO REGISTER IS JULY 2, 2024  
VISIT [WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/SUMMERSKATES](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/SUMMERSKATES) TO REGISTER

### OUTDOOR SERIES:

SUMMER DATES TO BE ANNOUNCED ON WEBSITE. PLEASE VISIT  
[WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/OUTDOORSERIES](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/OUTDOORSERIES) TO REGISTER

### SABAH'S 2024 STARLIGHT NIGHT AUCTION & GALA:

NOVEMBER 21, 2024  
BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER  
PLEASE VISIT [WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/GALA](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/GALA) FOR UPDATES

SABAH'S 2023 STARLIGHT NIGHT

# Crafty BREWS AND BARBEQUE

NOVEMBER 17, 2023  
6:30 PM

BUFFALO NIAGARA  
CONVENTION CENTER

AUCTION AND GALA



On Friday, November 17, 2023, SABAH hosted its annual Starlight Night Auction and Gala in support of SABAH's seven adaptive recreational programs for athletes challenged by disability. This year's event, *Crafty Brews and Barbeque*, featured an enchanting and fun-filled summer evening under the "stars" of the Buffalo Convention Center. The Happy Hour featured live music by the Hazzard County Band, craft beer sampling from the 42 North Tap Trekker Van, outdoor games, amazing raffle baskets, a thrilling live auction, a gourmet barbeque dinner, and the announcement of SABAH's newest Hall of Fame Inductee, Kristen Mruk.

Save the date for SABAH's 2024 Starlight Night Auction and Gala  
November 21, 2024!



SPIRITED ATHLETES

**SABAH**

BOLD AT HEART

2607 Niagara Street  
Buffalo, New York 14207

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SABAH PRESENTS

# JUKEBOX JAM

A MOVIE PREMIERE CELEBRATING THE REMARKABLE  
ACHIEVEMENTS OF SABAH ATHLETES CHALLENGED  
BY DISABILITY

MARCH 28, 2024, 6:00 P.M.  
BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER

TICKET INFORMATION:

[WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE](http://WWW.SABAHINC.ORG/CELEBRATIONONICE)

SPONSORED BY *Wegmans*

# THE 2024 CELEBRATION ON ICE SHOW