

National Down Syndrome Congress Big Game Ball Kicks Off the College Football Season by Raising Funds

Creating Scholarships for Individuals with Down syndrome

ATLANTA, GA, USA, September 8, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The National Down Syndrome Congress' Inaugural Big Game Ball, presented by Peach Bowl, Inc., took place at the College Football Hall of Fame on September 1, 2022, and served as the first event of the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Classic weekend.



A packed College Football Hall of Fame for the Big Game Ball

The event raised nearly \$350,000.00, led by corporate sponsors Peach Bowl, Inc., Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Company Atlanta, Jorie Healthcare Partners, Kroger, and the generous donation of Stephen Glover with Ballbag Inc.

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Jordan Kough, NDSC Executive Director

Before a gathering of more than 400, Clemson University, Georgia Institute of Technology, and the University of Georgia were honored for making significant contributions to developing and enhancing inclusive postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. The University of Oregon's College of Education Special Education Graduate program was recognized as a top producer of special education professionals who will continue to forge the way for inclusive education. Additionally, Hallmark Movies & Mysteries, Think College, Stephanie Smith Lee, and Caden Cox, the first individual with Down syndrome to play in and score in an NCAA football game were also honored at the Big Game Ball. The ceremony was emceed by Mr. College Football, Tony

Barnhart and his wife, Maria Barnhart, and included testimonies from current and former

students of the postsecondary programs.

“The Big Game Ball sought to increase awareness of inclusive postsecondary opportunities for students with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities. The event will fund scholarships for students with Down syndrome and support the work of National Down Syndrome Congress as we continue to ensure quality model standards for postsecondary programs and policy support to educators who continue to forge the path of inclusive education at all levels,” expressed Jordan Kough, Executive Director of NDSC.

Special guests from the evening included Clemson University President James Clements, Georgia Tech President Angel Cabrera, Georgia Tech head football coach Geoff Collins, Matt Stinchcomb and Kevin Butler former UGA football players and members of the College Football Hall of Fame, Interim President Patrick Phillips of the University of Oregon and Jere Morehead, University of Georgia

President, provided videos congratulating their programs. Clemson University Head Coach, Dabo Swinney, also provided a video expressing his support of the ClemsonLIFE program and encouraged others to create opportunities for individuals with disabilities within their own universities and athletic programs. Atlanta Falcons quarterback and proud alumna of University of Oregon Marcus Mariota also provided a video congratulating the University of Oregon's College of Education. Coach Ryan Day, Head Football Coach of the Ohio State Buckeyes, sent a video congratulating Caden Cox.

About the inclusive postsecondary education honorees:

- The ClemsonLIFE™ program at Clemson University offers a collegiate experience that prepares students with intellectual disabilities for competitive employment and independent living through a combination of academic coursework and career exploration. ClemsonLIFE™ incorporates functional academics, independent living, employment, and social/leisure skills in a

Fifty years ago, the founders of the National Down Syndrome Congress set out to **reshape** the way people understand and experience Down syndrome and create a world that provides **equal rights and opportunities** – one where parents are no longer counseled to institutionalize their children with Down syndrome but instead place priority on saving for them to attend an institute of **postsecondary education**.



NDSC set out to change the way people experience Down syndrome



Lily D. Moore presents Hallmark Big Game Ball Corporate Award

university setting with the goal of producing self-sufficient young adults.

- Georgia Tech Excel is a four-year postsecondary program offered by the Georgia Institute of Technology for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Excel provides a structured, supportive, and inclusive opportunity and addresses the full scope of the needs of this population, from fundamental academics to social activities and vocational preparation.
- Destination Dawgs, the University of Georgia's inclusive postsecondary program is a non-degree certificate program for students with I/DD aiming to help with the transition to adulthood by offering participants an opportunity to prepare for a career and independent living. Students audit UGA courses, gain valuable job skills, and build a social network based on individual plans supported by peer mentors.
- The University of Oregon College of Education Special Education graduate program has been one of the top three programs in the country since 2000 and is the highest-ranked academic program at the University of Oregon. The faculty at the Special Education graduate program is actively researching important issues in the field of early intervention and special education.

About the event honorees:

- Think College provides resources, technical assistance, and training related to college options for students with intellectual disabilities and manages the only national listing of over 310 college programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the United States.
- Hallmark Movies & Mysteries was recognized as the 2022 Corporate Honoree for their movie "Color My World With Love," which tells the story of two young individuals with Down syndrome who fall in love. Hallmark is breaking down barriers and allowing viewers with disabilities to finally see themselves represented on screens. The award was presented by the film's lead actress, Lily D. Moore.
- Stephanie Smith Lee is a national leader in disability policy with over thirty-five years of experience, including serving in senior Congressional staff positions. Since her daughter, Laura, was born with Down syndrome in 1982, she has led many successful disability advocacy efforts. As the Director of the Office of Special Education Programs in the US Department of Education, from 2002 through 2005, Stephanie was responsible for the implementation and played a key role in the reauthorizations of IDEA, the Federal special education law.
- Caden Cox, a football player at Hocking College in Nelsonville, OH, made history twice on September 11, 2021, as the first person with Down syndrome to play and score in an NCAA or NJCAA college football game. Caden is also the first Hocking College athlete to sign a NIL contract and represents Rocky Brands.

About National Down Syndrome Congress: The National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) is a

not-for-profit organization dedicated to an improved world for individuals with Down syndrome. NDSC is a leading national resource of support and information for anyone touched by or seeking to learn about Down syndrome from the moment of diagnosis through adulthood. The purpose of the NDSC is to promote the interests of people with Down syndrome through advocacy, public awareness, and information. To learn more about NDSC visit www.ndsccenter.org.

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