

Gotta' Run

Special Olympics Torch Run

Once a year, the Special Olympics Torch Run crosses North Carolina on the way to the state games. North Carolina's Law Enforcement Torch Run is the largest year-round fundraising campaign for Special Olympics in the state, with nearly 2,000 law enforcement personnel participating annually. The 2026 season features multiple events leading up to the Final Leg on May 29, when the Flame of Hope culminates at the Special Olympics NC Summer Games Opening Ceremony in Raleigh.

One of my favorite days of the year is when the torch passes through Salisbury and continues to Spencer. Not only has it been one of my favorite days, but May 15th, 2024, was one of the most important days of my life. I didn't run first thing that Thursday morning because it was Torch Run day, meaning just over six miles waited for me later during a humid mid-morning.

I had a breakfast event and then headed to Airport Road and Main Street, next to the Speedway convenience store and joined good friends Adalie Harrison, Joel Whittington and about 50 others with law enforcement or government ties to start our part of the Torch Run just after 10am. We stopped at Stallings Baptist for water and a bathroom break, then on to Bell Tower Green to meet some Special Olympics athletes and greet several local dignitaries near the stage.

Then came the rest of the run on to my favorite car wash in Spencer where we finish each year. Nothing about this run is a race because the pace is held to about 12-minute miles. There are a few hills, but just as much downhill as uphill. The torch is only carried by the law enforcement personnel, and they are usually just behind the lead vehicle. Salisbury Police and Fire keep the runners safe along with the Rowan County Sheriff's Department while many of them participate in the run too.

Lots of photos are made before, along the way and at the end, in fact running with the torch is a big celebration and a fantastic memory. Any running event is good for me, but the best occur when the funds raised are headed toward a great cause, as certainly this one is.

This year, Salisbury PD Sgt. Adam Bouk and Sgt. Meredith Walker, who coordinate the NCLETR, have opened the event to other runners. The only requirement is to purchase an LETR shirt for \$25 and run a 12-minute pace. Transportation will be provided back to your vehicle, which will be left at the starting point, new this year at The Forum. Commemorative performance and trucker hats are also available.

The Torch Run is just one of many events that Bouk and Walker have planned for Special Olympics fundraising. Bouk said, "Our fundraising goal is a big one this year!

Our goal last year was \$15,000 and we hit \$24,600. So, we will push for \$35,000 this year, Aim high, hit high, I hope!”

Bouk continued, “There are several of the Rowan County athletes that go to the state games. That is the weekend of May 29-31 this year. We went last year and ran the final leg of the Torch Run, did the opening ceremony and then hung the medals around the athletes’ necks after the games the following day. About 1500 athletes compete free of charge in eight sports. We are going again for the final leg this year as well. All of this has been the highlight of my law enforcement career.”

During the late afternoon after the Torch Run of May 24th, 2024, I fell in a farming accident and broke my back. A long recovery after that day allowed me the privilege of running again at the Torch Run in May 2025 and I look forward to May 7th to do it again.

To join in the upcoming Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics, call Sgt. Bouk’s office at 704-216-7556 or email him at abouk@salisburync.gov or Sgt. Walker at mwalk@salisburync.gov

Our next local race is the West Rowan Bible Teachers 5K and Fun Run on April 18th. Look for this, and more upcoming events at www.salisburyrowanrunners.org