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# BEVERLY HILLS COURIER

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## Realty Group (AREA) Makes Special Olympics Its Charity Of Choice



Members of the Associated Realty of the Americas (AREA) have made a down payment on a pledge of support for the 2015 International Special Olympics being held this summer in Los Angeles under the chairmanship of Rafer Johnson (right), the former Olympic decathlon champion. Giving him the first check in an ongoing campaign at the Peninsula Beverly Hills were AREA member Hans Hansson (left) of San Francisco and Beverly Hills realtor Ronna Brand of Brand Realty, chair of AREA's Special Olympics Fund.

All this came about when Brand told her fellow AREA members of reuniting with Johnson and renewing a long dormant friendship first begun when she was a small child.

As a youngster, Brand attended UES, a progressive school adjacent to UCLA with a highly unusual curriculum. If one were studying the Hopi Indians, the student ate, dressed, and lived like one for the entire semester which included making one's own beef

jerky and taking naps in a homemade Hopi pueblo. One day Johnson visited the school to teach the youngsters how to run.

Last winter, Brand was in a Beverly Hills doctor's office waiting for an appointment. There she listened to a stranger explain the finer points of a soccer game both were viewing on a TV in the facility. "So, you must have been an athlete. I can tell by looking at you," she said.

"Yes," he answered. "I played some pro basketball and ran track at UCLA. My name is Rafer Johnson."

As they renewed their long lost friendship and knowing his involvement with the charity, Brand recounted a second meeting they had had 25 years earlier when she was a volunteer of the Special Olympics. After sharing her story with fellow AREA members, the group was prompted to make the Special Olympics its charity of choice.