

A Brief History of National Senior Games

In the mid-1960s, the National Recreation Association, now known as the National Recreation and Parks Association, developed a "Lifetime Sports" program, which emphasized getting individuals involved in sports which they could compete in throughout their life span. As the concept developed across the country in the mid-1970s, middle aged amateur athletes of the mid-1960s were becoming mature senior athletes.

Warren W. Blaney, a Los Angeles businessman, is widely recognized as the founder of the Senior Games Movement. Blaney, a track and field athlete in his youth, entered one of the track events for adult athletes that were springing up, in part due to the jogging craze triggered by Dr. Kenneth Cooper's influential best-selling book *Aerobics*. The experience inspired Blaney to dream of an Olympic-style multi-sports event for older athletes. In 1969, he founded a nonprofit organization and secured the help of the Helms Athletic Foundation and the *Los Angeles Times*. A year later, Blaney staged the first "Senior Olympix" in Los Angeles.



Senior Games Movement pioneer Warren Blaney (far right)

From there, the movement spread from California to other states. The first recurring games began in 1975 in Sanford, Florida, which are still being held annually 42 years later. By the mid-1980s, 33 multi-sport games for seniors had been established around the country.

In 1985, an effort was launched in St. Louis to create a national competition event, led by Harris Frank and Ken Marshall. Seven men and women formed the original leadership for what was initially known as the National Senior Olympics Organization (NSOO). In the fall of 1985, they hosted a meeting of individuals who were currently conducting games for seniors in their states. That group planned the first National Senior Olympic Games, held in 1987 in St. Louis.

The first games were a great success involving more than 2,500 competitors in 15 sports. The NSOO was formalized during the games – with a Board of Directors elected, articles of incorporation filed in the State of Missouri, and bylaws adopted. An estimated 100,000 spectators viewed the first Games ceremonies featuring Bob Hope at the St. Louis Riverfront Arch.

The second Games also took place in St. Louis in 1989, hosting 3,400 senior athletes. The event received significant national media coverage by the *New York Times*, *ESPN* and *ABC's Good Morning America*. After this second success, The Games began to move to a different city every two years to stimulate more awareness and participation around the country.

Passing the Torch: National Senior Games Host Cities

YEAR	HOST CITY	SPORTS	# OF ATHLETES
1987	St. Louis, MO	15	2500
1989	St. Louis, MO	16	3,400
1991	Syracuse, NY	18	5,000
1993	Baton Rouge, LA	18	7,200
1995	San Antonio, TX	18	8,200
1997	Tucson, AZ	18	10,300
1999	Orlando, FL	18	12,000
2001	Baton Rouge, LA	18	8,700*
2003	Hampton Roads, VA	18	10,700
2005	Pittsburgh, PA	18	11,000
2007	Louisville, KY	18	12,000
2009	Palo Alto, CA	18	10,000
2011	Houston, TX	18	10,100
2013	Cleveland, OH	19	10,800
2015	Minneapolis, MN	19	9,989
2017	Birmingham, Alabama	19	10,517

*Reflects more stringent qualifying standards

In 1990, an agreement was reached with the United States Olympic Committee based on its objection to the use of the term Olympic in the organization's corporate name, and the name was changed to the U.S. National Senior Sports Organization. The event is now known as The National Senior Games and the organization does business as the National Senior Games Association (NSGA). NSGA remains as an ongoing Multi-Sport Council member of the USOC.

NSGA moved its corporate office from St. Louis to Baton Rouge, LA, in 1997. The organization now includes 53 member qualifying games in every state, the District of Columbia, Canada Games and The National Veterans Golden Age Games. Since 2007, Humana has supported the biennial event as Presenting Sponsor, underscoring its commitment to advocate healthy, active aging and wellness.

The non-profit organization is dedicated to not only stage quality games for seniors, but to also put its Mission Statement into action: "To promote health and wellness for adults 50 and over through fitness, education and sport." There is now an affiliated NSGA Foundation, and NSGA has a full-time Health and Wellness Manager on staff to advance the mission.

Today, the National Senior Games has grown to one of the largest multi-sport events in the world. We are proud to continue to fulfill the vision that Warren Blaney summarized in a 1983 *Los Angeles Times* interview. "This kind of thing is good in every way," he said. "Instead of looking back as they get older, Senior Olympians think about tomorrow. They think, 'I'll beat that guy next year.'"