

LIFE AWARDS 2008 IN INNSBRUCK

Innsbruck.- the beautiful Theatre of Innsbruck, the Landestheater, a wonderful building of the 18th century - was the center of the Life Award presentation 2008. The worldwide unique recognition of people with handicaps, who get awarded for outstanding mastery of their destiny, was presented by Miriam Weichselbraun, Austria's charming and popular moderator, a young Tyrolean.

The world's only award for people with handicap went this year to:

- the women's, sports teacher and philosopher Professor Lydia la Riviere-Zijdel (NL) for her life's work,
- Oliver Antosch, staff, council and the disabled officer of the adidas AG, in the category "Economy and Society".
- the austrian Art-brut artist Josef Hofer in the category "arts and culture".
- in the category Sport won the gold medalist from Beijing (wheelchair marathon), Thomas Geierspichler
- the multiple worldwide award winner Sabriye Tenberken, born in Germany, now at home in Tibet and India won the "Special Life Award".
- the Award for organizations went to the "Lebenshilfe Austria",
- and the unprecedented performance of the team from "Race Across America" was awarded with a Special Sports Award.

The winners represent many extraordinary people and were honoured in a glamorous evening with international artists such as percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie, Papermoon, Petra Frey, Anasi Drums, Rosi Schipflinger and Leo Jöchl.

The Life Award was developed by the Tyrolean Ingrid Larese and launched this year for the fourth time. For the first time besides the already known categories of life achievement, economy and society, sports, art, organizations and Special Award there was also a sports special prize, which was awarded to a great team performance.

The Life Award in the category of "Life's Achievement" went to women's rights and self-defense teacher Professor Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel from the Netherlands for her particular personal commitment to disabled women around the world, lately particularly in the developing countries in Africa and Asia. Even in a wheelchair, she gives courses in self-defense for disabled women and girls, she holds the black belt in karate and Aikido and is requested around the world as a discussion participant and speaker at political meetings.

In the category "Economy and Society" Oliver Antosch received the Life Award 2008 award. Oliver Antosch is in a wheelchair with paraplegia due to a motorcycle accident at the age of 18 years. He is in a leading position in the IT field at the adidas AG and still finds time and energy as a council commissioner for disability and the needs of sick and disabled employees. Moreover, he is responsible for Audi AG in an advisory activities in the development of disabled vehicles.

In the category "Arts and Culture", the "Life Award 2008" went to the Upper Austrian painter and illustrator Josef Hofer. Josef Hofer has multiple physical and mental disabilities, and is also deaf. He grew up with his brother, five years older, and also disabled, in Upper Austria on a farm. He gained international recognition when he was included in the "Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne". Arnulf Rainer called him the most influential artist of this kind in Austria.

With the Life Award in the category "Sport" Salzburg's racing wheelchair athlete Thomas Geierspichler was honored. Thomas Geierspichler is an exceptional athlete who was able, after a short period of training, to excel with the world's top athletes in the field. His last and probably biggest triumph so far was the gold medal in the marathon at the Paralympics in Beijing.

The "Special Life Award" goes to the German-born Sabriye Tenberken, who has received many excellent world awards. She is a Tibet specialist and is arguably one of the most famous blind women worldwide. She developed a Braille for Tibet. 1997 she travelled in the Tibet Autonomous Region and founded jointly with the engineer Paul Kronenberg a school for blind children. Until that time the blind and visually impaired lived there in isolation from the society and had no access to schools or training centres. In the meantime, her organization "Braille without Borders" founded also a center in India. This is intended to help blind people worldwide have access to schools and professions whenever possible. Sabriye Tenberken published several books, which were bestsellers. She was known worldwide through the joint film project "Blindsight" with Eric Weihenmayer, who became the first blind man to climb Mount Everest.

The first time this year the Sports Special Award was awarded and it goes to the exceptional performance of the "Race Across America" - team: In ten days across America it was an Austrian team, which provided the first ever wheelchair athletes at the toughest long-distance cycling event of the World. And so far the only one! Thomas Bechter (born 1970), Philipp Bonadimann (born 1980), Juergen Egle (born 1971), Hubert Kilga (born 1953), Klaus Salzmann (born 1964) and Wolfgang Wimmer (born 1963) dared the 4912 km from the West to the East coast, had to conquer in 10 days, 33.440 meters of altitude. A physical and mental borderline effort for all team members.

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