



For Immediate Release:

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Special Olympics PA to Hold 43rd Annual Winter Games at Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Feb. 9-11

Snowboarding Introduced as a Competition Sport; Winter Games Polar Plunge on Feb. 1st

(Norristown, PA, January 30, 2020) – More than 300 athletes and 135 coaches will travel to the 43rd Annual Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) Winter Games, presented by [Highmark](#), held at Seven Springs Mountain Resort in Seven Springs, PA from February 9th - 11th. During the course of the event, athletes and coaches participate in three days of exciting winter sports – competing in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and, for the first time ever, snowboarding with support from Snowboard Competition Sponsor [Gilson Snow](#).

This year's competition will also include the fifth annual Unified Sports Experience featuring Special Olympics athletes (individuals with intellectual disabilities) and partners (individuals without intellectual disabilities) in a friendly snowshoeing competition prior to Opening Ceremonies for the honor of carrying the Special Olympics Flag into Opening.

Opening Ceremonies for the 2020 Winter Games will begin on Sunday, February 9th at 7:30 p.m. in the Seven Springs Mountain Resort Festival Plaza. Co-emceed by WTAE Channel 4's Evening Anchor Shannon Perrine, the anticipated Ceremony will feature entertainment, an array of speakers, the parade of athletes, the official lighting of the Olympic Cauldron by athletes and members of law enforcement, and a fireworks display.

Competition is slated to begin on Monday, February 10th and will offer all events at the Seven Springs Mountain Resort. Awards and Closing Ceremonies are scheduled to take place at each venue respectively from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on February 11th.

Additionally, the Games will host Healthy Habits programs where interactive education stations will help build awareness of how healthy habits affect sport performance and every life. Noncompeting Health and Fitness Coordinators will be on-site to discuss nutrition and healthy food options. [Click here](#) for more information about our health programs.

“We are thrilled to be continuing our relationship with Seven Springs Mountain Resort and the surrounding communities who have continued to welcome our athletes, coaches, and volunteers with open arms,” said Mike Ermer, SOPA's Western Competition Director. “It has been amazing to watch this event get bigger and better each year, and I know our Winter Games committee has been diligently working to make this the best year yet.”

To kick-off the Winter Games' 43rd annual celebration, hundreds of brave individuals will be “freezin’ for

a reason” during the [2020 Winter Games Polar Plunge](#) held on Saturday, February 1st. Supporters will brave the cold waters of Canoe Creek State Park Lake in Hollidaysburg, PA at 12 p.m. with the goal of bringing awareness to the Winter Games and raising funds to help benefit Western PA Special Olympics athletes year-round. The plunge is open to the public (\$50 minimum donation to participate) and all spectators are welcome free of charge. Visit www.PlungePA.org for more information.

Special Olympics Pennsylvania athletes and coaches from the following city/county programs will compete during Winter Games: Allegheny County, Area M (Dauphin, Perry, Cumberland, and Northern York Counties), Area P (Susquehanna, Wayne, Pike, Lackawanna, Wyoming), Armstrong/Indiana Counties, Beaver County, Bethlehem City, Bucks County, Butler County, Carbon County, Centre County, Chester County, Erie, Lancaster County, Lehigh County, Lycoming County, Montgomery County, Northampton County, Somerset County, Washington County, Westmoreland County, York County, and athletes from the states of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

More than 1,200 volunteers from the community, corporations, schools and universities will participate in the event, serving in numerous capacities including as officials, athlete escorts, award presenters, and in administrative support services. Volunteers from across the state are welcome and spectators are encouraged to visit any of the competition venues to cheer on the athletes. For more information, or to volunteer, contact Mike Ermer at 1-800-233-5161 x 243 or mermer@specialolympicspa.org.

Winter Games 2020 is presented by Highmark. Additionally, Gilson, Sheetz, Aerotek, GEICO, Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Sam’s Club, DICK’S Sporting Goods, Acme Corrugated Box Company, Energy Transfer, Hidden Valley Resort, Pennsylvania Tourism Office, the David and Marjorie Rosenberg Foundation, the Knights of Columbus, Allegheny Health Network, the Pittsburgh Pirates and Pirates Charities, Budd Baer Collision Center, John E. and Sue M. Jackson Charitable Trust, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., and the Donald B. and Dorothy L. Stabler Foundation are major sponsors of this year’s event. WJAC will serve as the official TV Station for the Winter Games and the Tribune Democrat will serve as the official Winter Games Newspaper.

About Special Olympics Pennsylvania

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) provides year-round training and competition in 21 Olympic-type sports to more than 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities. For 50 years, SOPA and its 54 local programs have used the power of sports to transform the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and unite everyone by fostering community and building a more acceptable and civil society. SOPA is much more than a sports organization. Through its Athlete Leadership Programs, athletes assume meaningful leadership roles, influence change within the Special Olympics movement and take on roles as Global Messengers (trained as public speakers for Special Olympics), athlete representatives, coaches, board members and more. SOPA also addresses major challenges facing its athletes including healthcare. Its Healthy Athletes program offers athletes free health screenings in the form of eye, ear, dental and podiatry assessments. Athletes are also taught how to live active lifestyles, eat healthy and more. Additionally, SOPA strives to create a unified world by promoting inclusion, uniting communities, and changing attitude. Through Unified Sports, SOPA brings together individuals with and without intellectual disabilities as equal teammates in training and competition, which promotes respect and acceptance, and facilitates meaningful relationships between people of all abilities. For more information about how you can join “The Inclusion Revolution,” visit www.specialolympicspa.org.