

Special Olympics opens at Seven Springs

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The 38th annual Pennsylvania Special Olympics were kicked off Sunday night at Seven Springs Mountain Resort.

Teams came from all over Pennsylvania and parts of Virginia and Maryland to compete in alpine, cross country, speed and figure skating, and snow shoeing. Coaches and competitors on the Somerset County team are looking forward to the week's events. The team is made of three members, Brian Miller of Bakersville, Mike Wyant of Bakersville, and Jessica Barley of Berlin.

Coach Sue Putman said the team is ready for the competition at Seven Springs. She said this is the first year at the resort, so naturally there are some logistical challenges like scheduling and moving equipment.

"We're working everything out, so next year here will be great," she said.

Putman said the staff at the resort has been very helpful and professional. The Somerset team will be competing in cross county skiing and snow shoeing on Monday and Tuesday.

Coaches Brad Zearfoss and Nate Bergstresser said they are excited about starting the games.

"This is our town, so we hope we have that extra bit of luck," Zearfoss said.

Bergstresser said the team has been training every weekend since November in preparation for the games, even though the weather hasn't been ideal.



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Staff photo by Amber RosadoThe 38th annual Pennsylvania Special Olympics Winter Games were kicked off Sunday night at Seven Springs Mountain Resort. The ceremonial torch was lit by Westmoreland competitor Mark Suman with the help of the Pennsylvania Law Enforcement Torch Run members Trooper David McGarvey of Holidaysburg and Assistant Chief Scott Shubert of the Pittsburgh city police.

“Sometimes it’s hard to cross country ski if there isn’t any snow,” he said. “So we’ve been working on conditioning.”

The opening ceremonies included skiing shows from the instructors at Seven Springs and fireworks. The most anticipated event was the lighting of the torch to kick off the games. The torch was lit by competitor Mark Suman of Westmoreland County and members of the Pennsylvania Law Enforcement Torch Run, Trooper David McGarvey of Holidaysburg and Assistant Chief Scott Shubert of the Pittsburgh city police.

McGarvey said helping light the torch was a great experience.

“We have the run in the summer and anything we can do to help with the games is a great way to tie it in,” he said.

Shubert said he enjoys interacting with the athletes.

“You notice every day that what you’re doing makes a difference,” he said. “It touches your heart and it’s a great feeling.”

Shubert said he was proud that one of his officers at the Pittsburgh police department, Pamuela Deguffory, skied down the mountain along with the torch.

The competition starts 9 a.m. on Monday with figure skating and dance competition at the Cambria County War Memorial Arena.