

## Special Olympics: 'High energy' for speed skating at Planet Ice

By Kelly Urban

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Speed was the name of the game at Planet Ice.

As the Special Olympic Pennsylvania Winter Games concluded Tuesday, 52 speed-skating athletes laid it all out on the ice at the Richland Township rink in hopes of earning a place atop the medal podium.

"It's a day filled with awesomeness," said Steve Koch, SOPA's eastern competition director. "The athletes are full of smiles and the high energy we get radiates throughout the building."

Athletes, ranging in ages from 13 to 50, competed in individual and relay races and were grouped by age, gender and ability level.

"They have all have worked so hard and are ready to compete and have fun," Koch said. "They're ready to showcase their amazing abilities and they compete with the Olympic spirit."

Hillary McFadden, 31, has been competing in speed skating for 13 years and said she doesn't let the fact that she's blind slow her down.

"I don't let blindness get in my way and I'm doing something that's amazing and it's not something blind people do," the Harrisburg resident said.

She said she looks forward to each race and is always working on increasing her speed.

"I'm like Speedy Gonzales and I feel free out there," McFadden said. "I use a cane when I walk and you have walk slower on the ground. But when I'm on the ice, I can go faster."

In preparation for the games, McFadden starts practicing at least once a week beginning in October.



### Special Olympics Pennsylvania Winter Games

Speed-skater Sydney Benner of Chester County displays her gold medal in the 25-meter straight race in the Special Olympics Pennsylvania Winter Games on Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2015, at Planet Ice in Richland Township.

"I also do training in the winter, doing sprints and running," she said.

David Persing, 31, from Blair County has been speed-skating for seven years and is one of the original members of the county's team.

"It's exciting and I got into it because I wanted to try a new sport," he said.

Persing was competing in three individual events and one relay.

"I just like the whole thing," he said.

Other events event Tuesday included figure skating at the Cambria County War Memorial Arena and and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing at Seven Springs Mountain Resort.

The games concluded Tuesday with awards and closing ceremonies at each venue.