



Disabled athletes compete at home

Special Olympics come to York Region

Holding the 2000 Millennium Special Olympics in York Region will give local mentally challenged athletes Maria Gabriele, Dana Standeven and Alex Keeting a chance to compete on their own turf.

"I think it's wonderful for the community and York Region," Gabriele said moments after a press conference yesterday to announce the Games.

"It's exciting and it will be fun. It's nice that it's near home."

Acting chief Peter Scott, special athletes Dana Standeven, Maria Gabriele and Alex Keeting light an olympic torch and hoist a symbolic flag in celebration of the Special Olympics of York Region.

The 30-year-old Newmarket woman will be competing in five-pin bowling, one of five events that will be held throughout the region from May 11 to 14, 2000.

York Regional Police, who are sponsoring the event, have kicked off a \$1-million fundraising campaign. The force is hoping the community will throw its financial support behind the Games.

The budget for the Special Olympics is \$600,000. But the police are hoping to raise an extra \$400,000 to assist athletes from the region and to launch a number of new initiatives for mentally challenged athletes.

"It is indeed an exciting day for the Special Olympics. I can tell you, the Games in 2000 will be an invigorating experience for the community," Ontario Special Olympics executive director Glenn MacDonell said.

"The spirit will overtake the community, for certain. The residents from one end of this region to the other end of this region will see the Games come to life."

Acting police Chief Peter Scott said the Special Olympics have brought added meaning to the lives of mentally disabled athletes for the past three decades.

"We will have the opportunity to see literally hundreds of athletes come to our community," he added.

"To see these athletes compete at the peak of their ability is inspiring."

Scott is confident residents and businesses in the region will help with the fundraising campaign.

"This is a caring community. It is not afraid to get involved and we're counting on it to give us the help we need," he said.

To Gabriele, Standeven and Keeting, the most important part of the Games will be participating in the events and making new friends.

"I will be nervous, but it will be fun," said Standeven, a 19-year-old regional swimmer.

"You make good friends," added 41-year-old Keeting. The Richmond Hill resident will compete in swimming and 10-pin bowling.

Floor hockey will be held at the Garnet A. Williams Community Centre in Vaughan and weightlifting will be at St. Andrew's College in Aurora.

Richmond Hill will host swimming at the Richvale Pool.

Five-pin bowling will be held at Stellar Lanes in Newmarket while 10-pin bowling will take place at Club 300 in Markham.

Opening and closing ceremonies will be held at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex in Newmarket.

"To say I'm excited and overjoyed that York Region has been awarded the Games is an understatement. I'm absolutely thrilled," said Games chairperson Const. Rob Plunkett.

- Lisa Queen



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