



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**Special Olympics Pennsylvania Winter Games Set for February 10 – 12, 2013**

Alpine Skiing Events to take place at Hidden Valley Resort

*Laurel Highlands Polar Plunge to Kickoff Games on February 9<sup>th</sup>*

More than 300 athletes and 135 coaches will travel to the 2013 Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) Winter Games in Johnstown, PA from February 10-12th. This statewide competition is returning to the Johnstown area for the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive year and will feature competition in alpine and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and figure and speed skating. Presenting sponsor Lee Initiatives, Inc.; Sheetz, GEICO; UPMC; The Palumbo Charitable Trust; and The Jack Buncher Foundation are the premier sponsors of this year's event.

To kick Winter Games off a day in advance on Saturday, February 9, 2013, hundreds of brave individuals will be "freezin' for a reason" as they take the plunge into the cold waters of Quemahoning Reservoir in Boswell, PA at 1 p.m. The goal is to bring awareness to the 2013 Winter Games and hold a successful 2nd Annual Polar Plunge in the Laurel Highlands area, benefiting Western PA Special Olympics athletes. The plunge is open to the public (50 minutes to Plunge) and all spectators are welcome free of charge.

Winter Games will begin with Opening Ceremonies on Sunday, February 10 at 6:30 p.m. in Central Park, located on Main Street in the heart of Downtown Johnstown. The anticipated Opening will feature an array of speakers and performances to motivate and entertain the athletes, and commence competition with the official the lighting of the Olympic Torch.

"Playing host to athletes for the alpine events is a highlight of our winter season," Laura Argenbright, Hidden Valley's marketing manager, said. "We are proud to be a part of this exciting event. The enthusiasm of the athletes as well as the dedication of the volunteers is an inspiration to us all."

Competition is slated to begin on Monday, February 11 and will offer competition in alpine skiing (Hidden Valley Four Seasons Resort); cross-country skiing (Blue Knob Four Seasons Resort); snowshoeing (Blue Knob Ski Resort); figure skating (Cambria County War Memorial Arena); and speed skating (Planet Ice, Richland). Individual, relay, and team events will take place. Award and Closing Ceremonies are scheduled to take place at each venue from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on February 12th. "We are thrilled to return to the Johnstown area for a 12th consecutive year," said Mike Ermer, SOPA's Associate Competition Director - West. "We are also excited to have Lesley Meyer as our Winter Games Event Director and the support of a dedicated Winter Games Committee who have worked for months to make this event a memorable one for our athletes and families."

For the seventh year in a row Special Olympics Pennsylvania will present the Winter Games Spirit Award, which will acknowledge the outstanding energy, determination and enthusiasm of a Winter Games athlete. The awardee will be chosen by a select group of Winter Games committee members and will be presented during the Victory Dance on February 11th from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Richland High School.

SOPA athletes and coaches from the following programs will compete: Allegheny; Area M; Area P; Armstrong-Indiana; Bethlehem City; Blair; Bucks; Butler; Cambria; Centre; Chester; Erie City; Lancaster; Lehigh; Luzerne; Lycoming; Montgomery; Somerset; Tioga; Washington; Westmoreland; and York County as well as the states of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

More than 1,000 volunteers from the community, corporations, schools and universities participated in the event last year, serving in numerous capacities including officials, athlete escorts, award presenters, and administrative support services. Volunteers from across the state are welcome and spectators are encouraged to visit any of the competition venues to cheer on athletes. For more information, or to volunteer, contact Mike Ermer at 607-435-0693 or [mermer@specialolympicspa.org](mailto:mermer@specialolympicspa.org).

**About Special Olympics Pennsylvania**

Special Olympics Pennsylvania provides year-round training and competition in 22 Olympic-type sports to more than 20,000 children and adults with intellectual disabilities or closely related developmental disabilities. For more information about how you can *Be a Fan*, visit our web site at [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org).