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Torch lit to kick off annual Special Olympics

By MATTHEW TOTH mtot@dailyamerican.com Jan 28, 2018 Updated Jan 28, 2018



Staff photo Matthew Toth

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Aaron Barnes, 22, from Dillsburg, lights the torch for the 41st annual Special Olympic Games at the opening ceremony Sunday.

The 41st annual Pennsylvania Special Olympics kicked off Sunday night at Seven Springs Mountain resort.

More than 350 athletes, 175 coaches and 1,200 volunteers are traveling to Seven Springs to compete in the competitions. The resort hosts teams from all over Pennsylvania, as well as parts of Maryland and Virginia, to compete in alpine, cross country, speed and figure skating and snow shoeing.

John Vinzani, 37, attended his first opening ceremony Sunday. The snowshoer is ready to show people what he can do.

"I'm just going to take my turn doing it and enjoying it and being part of the team," he said.

This is the fourth consecutive year that Seven Springs is hosting the Special Olympics. People came from Virginia, Maryland and Delaware to compete with the Pennsylvania athletes.

Mike Wyant, 43, from Acosta, has been competing in the Special Olympics for several years. While he's aiming for a gold medal in this year's snowshoeing competitions, he said all he can do is push himself when he competes.

"It gets me motivated when I do my best, and I just like to have fun," he said.

Nate Bergstresser said he has two skiers this year to compete.

The Rockwood native has been coaching cross country skiers for 15 years at the Special Olympics.

"They've all battled pretty well," he said.

Bergestresser said his team has been doing a lot of endurance and balance training all year to compete, working on and off the snow to be in peak condition. Bergestresser said cross county skiing is all about having the mixture of endurance training and technique, but his skiers have fun and have a good time while doing it.

"They work hard, keep their regime, listen well and they push themselves," he said.

Andrew Sambol, 38, said he's in a transition year. The former cross country skier said he's competing this year as a snowshoer, trying to keep himself more fit since he's been losing weight.

"It's more walking but still keeping up that endurance," he said.

But just like his teammates, Sambol said he's aiming to come home with a gold medal.

"I'm going to be super," he said.

The games will take place through Tuesday at Seven Springs and the Kirk Nervin Arena in Greensburg.

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