

DESERET Morning News

Utah to host Deaflympics

Games will draw 400 athletes and 4,000 fans from 24 nations

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The Deaflympics — a sporting event without starting guns and referee whistles — is coming to Utah in 2007.

The Winter Games, which will run Feb. 1-10, will draw more than 400 deaf and hard-of-hearing athletes and 4,000 fans from at least 24 countries, said Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. in announcing Utah's selection as the Deaflympic winter venue for 2007.

Deaf athletes are considered able-bodied under International Olympic Committee rules and are not allowed to participate in the Paralympics. But communication barriers keep them from fully participating in the able-bodied Olympics, said Dr. I. King Jordan, co-chairman of the 2007 Deaflympics Honorary Advisory Board, at a press conference Thursday at the Governor's Mansion.

Snowboarder Jeff Pollock of Salt Lake City was one of the deaf and hard-of-hearing athletes in the audience.

At sports events such as ski racing or ice hockey, deaf athletes are at a disadvantage, Pollock said, because they can't hear the referee's whistle or the starting gun that signals them to leave the gate. At the Deaflympics, athletes are cued instead by flashing lights, hand signals and flags, explained Pollock, 34, who has competed in the 1999 and 2003 Deaflympics.

In addition, Pollock said, "Most deaf and hard-of-hearing athletes don't have the opportunity for training" available to their non-impaired colleagues. "Most sports teams are nonprofit and don't have money for interpreters."

Utah was chosen as the site of Deaflympic Winter Games not only because of its many venues left over from the 2002 Olympic Winter Games but because "the people of the community offer such warm hospitality," said Dwight Benedict, chairman of the 2007 Deaflympics Organizing Committee.

Events will include alpine skiing, snowboarding, Nordic skiing, ice hockey, curling, snowboarding and freestyle. The official Deaflympic torch will arrive on Feb. 1, 2007, and will relight the flame at Salt Lake City's 2002 Olympic Cauldron Park.

Thursday's press conference and a reception afterward were attended by athletes, Deaflympics officials, students from Salt Lake City's Jean Massieu School of the Deaf, and officials from Sorenson Media. The company's CEO,

James Lee Sorenson, presented the Deaflympics with a check for \$250,000.

Both Sorenson and Huntsman have served on the board of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the country's only exclusively deaf university. Deaflympics advisory board chairman Jordan is president of Gallaudet.

The Deaflympics began in Paris in 1924 and are the second-oldest multisport and cultural event in the world, according to Deaflympic officials. The 16th Deaflympic Summer Games concluded last month in Melbourne, Australia.

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