

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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2019 Special Olympics BC Winter Games set to be held in Greater Vernon

Next February, the 2019 Special Olympics BC Winter Games will be hosted in Greater Vernon, starring more than 800 athletes with intellectual disabilities from all over the province and the Yukon competing with pride in eight sports.

The 2019 Provincial Games will be the largest SOBC Winter Games to date, with a new sport joining the Special Olympics Canada winter-sport competition cycle. The sport of 5-pin bowling is moving from summer to winter, joining alpine skiing, cross country skiing, curling, figure skating, floor hockey, snowshoeing, and speed skating. The participating athletes will be supported by more than 250 volunteer coaches and mission staff.

The 2019 SOBC Games location was announced this morning (January 16) in the Vernon Recreation Centre, in an event with remarks from SOBC President & CEO Dan Howe, City of Vernon Mayor Akbul Mund, Greater Vernon Advisory Committee Chair Juliette Cunningham, School District 22 Board Chair Kelly Smith, and SOBC – Vernon athlete Justin Sigal.

Provincial Games are exciting and empowering experiences for Special Olympics athletes. For many, these Games offer their first opportunity to have the joy of travelling and being part of a team. The dedicated competitors will be shooting for personal-best performances, and they will also be chasing the opportunity to advance to national and international levels of competition. Top performers in Greater Vernon will qualify for spots on Team BC for the 2020 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games in Thunder Bay, Ont., which will be the qualifier for the 2021 Special Olympics World Winter Games.

Greater Vernon is already home to outstanding Special Olympics athletes, volunteers, and programs, as SOBC – Vernon runs 16 year-round sport, youth, and fitness programs, but this will be the first time that SOBC Provincial Games have been hosted here.

“In Special Olympics BC Games, the competitors showcase their talents and the true power and joy of sport, and they open hearts and minds to the abilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities, changing the way the world sees this population that is still too often forgotten or excluded. We know that Greater Vernon is home to outstanding venues and volunteers that will give our athletes the high-quality competitive experience they deserve,” Howe said at the January 16 announcement.

“For me, being part of Special Olympics means inclusiveness, teamwork, friendship, travel opportunities, working hard, being committed, dedication, and having fun,” said SOBC – Vernon athlete Sigal, who medalled in cross country skiing in the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games and currently also participates in alpine skiing.

“We are very honoured to be chosen as the host community for the 2019 Special Olympics BC Winter Games. We have a strong volunteer base for hosting games within Greater Vernon over the past years. Special Olympics is an integral part not only for the participants, but the parents and coaches who dedicate countless hours to provide competition for athletes who otherwise may not have the opportunity to excel at the sport they love,” Mayor Mund said.

“The joy of sports experienced in Special Olympics empowers the participants to become accepted and valued members of their communities, which leads to a more respectful and inclusive society for all,” Greater Vernon Advisory Committee Chair Cunningham said.

“School District No. 22 looks forward to opening our schools to the athletes and coaches as a place to unwind, and focus on their competition,” Board Chair Smith said. “The dedication shown by the competitors mirrors the dedication of many of our students, and we hope the energy of our students will be felt in the halls of our schools and transfer to the performance of the athletes at the Games.”

In 2019, the SOBC Games Opening Ceremony will be held on February 21, followed by competition throughout February 22 and 23. A Closing Ceremony open only to Games competitors will be held on February 23, followed by a volunteer recognition breakfast on February 24.

More than 1,000 volunteers will be needed to help stage this inspiring event. Volunteer registration details and Games venues will be announced in the weeks to come. Learn more at www.specialolympics.bc.ca and find SOBC on Facebook and Instagram @specialolympicsbc and Twitter @sobcsociety; the Games hashtags will be #SOBCGames #GreaterVernon2019.

About Special Olympics BC

Special Olympics BC is dedicated to enriching the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities through sport. In 55 communities around the province, we provide year-round training and competitive opportunities in 18 different sports to more than 4,600 athletes of all ages and a wide range of abilities, thanks to the dedicated efforts of over 3,900 volunteers. For more information, please visit www.specialolympics.bc.ca and find us on Facebook and Instagram @specialolympicsbc and Twitter

@sobcsociety. To learn more about SOBC – Vernon, visit www.sobcvernon.ca or find them on Facebook @sobcvernon.

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