



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Special Olympics Northern California Athletes Head to Boise, Idaho for the 2009 World Winter Games**

### ***Athletes from Fresno, San Jose and Tahoe area Join Special Olympics Team USA***

**PLEASANT HILL, Calif.** – After months of training and preparation, Special Olympics Northern California athletes are finally on their way to the most spectacular sporting event happening this year - the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Idaho. Nine athletes from Northern California will join 330 athletes from nearly every state and the District of Columbia and 120 coaches and managers in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Feb. 5 before the entire team departs for Idaho the next day. The Bank of America Charitable Foundation is the premier supporter of Special Olympics Team USA, making it possible for these athletes to share their talents and abilities with the world.

The Northern California team is represented by athletes from the Fresno, San Jose and Tahoe area. They include: **Holley Matlack** (cross country skiing, El Dorado Hills); **Jared Schmidt** (alpine skiing-Fresno); **Andrew Chiang** (snowshoeing-Campbell); **Jarod Aust** (snowboarding,Clovis); **Aaron McLain** (cross country skiing, Fresno);**Margaret Hernandez** (alpine skiing, Fresno); **Philip Sturgeon** (alpine skiing, South Lake Tahoe); **Diane Cunningham** (snowshoeing, San Jose);and **Ulises Ortiz** (snowboarding,Fresno).

“These athletes are thrilled for an opportunity to compete on the world stage,” said Matt Cohen, Vice Presidents of Sports for Special Olympics Northern California. “They are wonderful representatives of our program –they exemplify the best in sportsmanship, leadership and passion for competition. We wish them the best of luck.”

Selection of the World Games athletes was based on results from our Special Olympics Northern California Winter championship games hosted at Kirkwood Ski Resort last year. In order to qualify for World Games, athletes must compete at a regional competition and then advance to championship level of play. Each state or region is given a number of slots for each given sport. The names of all gold medal winners are compiled and then randomly selected for World Games competition.



The U.S. delegation will be the largest at the World Games. Overall, nearly 2,500 athletes from 104 countries will compete in these World Games. In addition, the event will draw 6,000 volunteers, 800 event officials and thousands of families, spectators and journalists from every continent.

“Through hard work, dedication and commitment, Special Olympics Team USA athletes have become some of the most inspiring competitors in the world,” said Special Olympics North America Managing Director Bob Gobrecht. “Competing in the World Games is a chance of a lifetime for many of our athletes, but also a chance for the rest of the world to witness the accomplishments and victories of people with intellectual disabilities.”

The World Games open with a star-studded and entertaining Opening Ceremonies on February 7. The athletes will then spend the rest of the week competing in Alpine Skiing, Cross Country Skiing, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey, Snowboarding, Snowshoe Racing, and Speed Skating. Closing Ceremonies will be on February 13. Family and friends will be able to watch highlights of the World Games and follow their favorite athletes at [www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org).

Special Olympics Team USA converged on Copper Mountain, Colorado in December 2008 for a training camp. The athletes have been training in their home communities through the past year. Athletes who were selected for Special Olympics Team USA qualified through their own Special Olympics State Winter Games.

### **About Special Olympics Northern California**

Special Olympics Northern California is a free year-round sports training and competition program for children and adults with developmental disabilities. More than 13,000 athletes compete in over 170 competitions throughout the region in 15 sports. Find out how you can be a fan and visit [www.SONC.org](http://www.SONC.org)

### **About Special Olympics**

Special Olympics is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities to become physically fit, productive and respected members of society through sports training and competition. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics provides year-round sports training and competition to nearly 3 million adults and children with intellectual disabilities across 180 countries. The Special Olympics movement offers one of the world's greatest platforms for acceptance and inclusion for all people—regardless of race, religion, ethnicity or cultural differences. Find out how you can become involved at [www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org).



### **About Bank of America Corporate Philanthropy**

Building on a long-standing tradition of investing in the communities it serves, Bank of America this year embarked on a new, ten-year goal to donate \$2 billion to nonprofit organizations engaged in improving the health and vitality of their neighborhoods. Funded by Bank of America, the Bank of America Charitable Foundation gave more than \$200 million in 2008, making the bank the most generous financial institution in the world and the second largest donor of all U.S. corporations in cash contributions. Bank of America approaches giving through a national strategy called "neighborhood excellence" under which it works with local leaders to identify and meet the most pressing needs of individual communities. Through Team Bank of America, bank associate volunteers contributed more than 900,000 hours in 2008 to enhance the quality of life in their communities nationwide. For more information about Bank of America Corporate Philanthropy, please visit [www.bankofamerica.com/foundation](http://www.bankofamerica.com/foundation).

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