

16th Winter Deaflympics

**Compiled & Written by Jodi B. Kinner
Edited by Valerie G. Kinney**

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On February 1 - 10, 2007, Utah hosted the 16th Winter Deaflympics. The United States Deaf Sports Federation (USADSF) chose Utah to conduct the Deaflympics on the basis of 2002 Olympic Winter Games, held in Utah, for three reasons: 1. Availability of world-class winter sports competition venues, 2. Utah's reputation for having the greatest snow on earth, and 3. An excellent pool of enthusiastic Deaf and hearing communities (Ingham, 2007).

The Winter Deaflympics began in 1924 and is the world's second oldest international sports festival, after the Olympics Games which began in 1896 (Ingham, 2007). In 2005, Dr. I. King Jordan, president of Gallaudet University and Honorary Co-



chairperson of the 16th Winter Deaflympics, commented at a press conference at the Governor's Mansion of the Utah governor, Jon Huntsman, Jr. "Deaf athletes are considered able-bodied under Olympic Committee rules and are not allowed to participate in the Paralympics, but communication barriers keep them from fully participating in the able-bodied Olympic" (Jarvik, *Deseret News*, February 17, 2005). Jeff Pollock, a 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2015 Deaflympics snowboarder stated, "To be a Deaf snowboarder in a race with hearing competitors is, in

a single word, lonely." He also added "Occasionally, there are physical challenges to being a Deaf athlete at competitions such as what some call "the hearing Olympics"

(Jarvik, *Deseret News*, January 31, 2007). Jeff gave examples by explaining that at sports events such as ski racing or ice hockey, Deaf athletes are at disadvantage 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 (Jarvik, *Deseret News*, February 17, 2005).

Deaflympics was cherished in the Deaf world. Edward Ingham, who lived in Utah at the time, was part of the Organizing Committee. He stated "The Deaflympics is one of the two largest international

festivals of Deaf people, which lead to international friendships through sharing of interests and experiences.

The other event is the Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf.

Unlike "hearing" international events, participants at international Deaf events tend to be able to easily communicate with

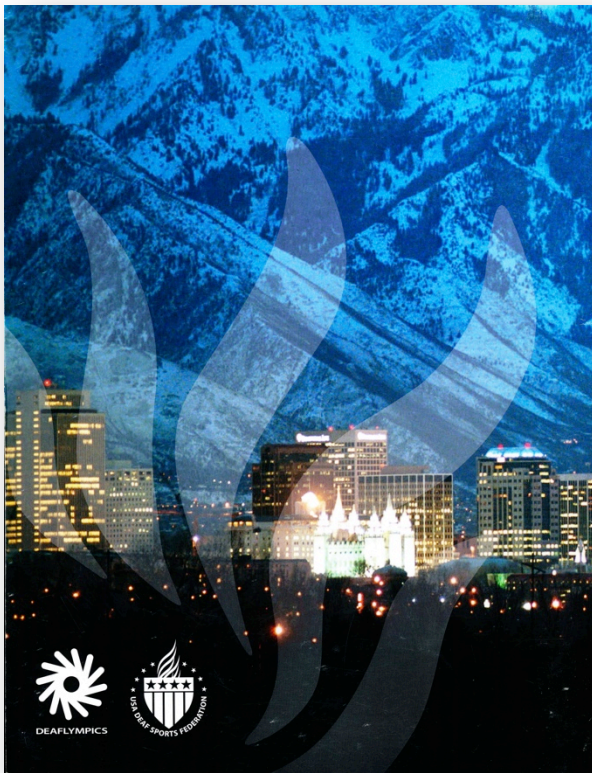
one another without interpreters. This is because their national sign languages have many shared linguistic features. This ease of communication and shared experiences leads to very close international friendships among those who attend the Deaflympics and the World Federation of the Deaf Congress" (Ingham, 2007).



Jeff Pollock relaxes at Brighton Ski Resort. (Keith Johnson, *Deseret Morning News*)

At the time, two Utah natives, Dr. Robert G. Sanderson and Ronald C. Burdett, were assigned to serve on the 16th Winter Deaflympics Board of Directors. In addition, Deaf volunteers in Utah, Dennis and Shirley Platt, Valerie Kinney, Eleanor "Eli" McCowan, Wendy Osterling, Justine Anderson, Jon Hodson, Scott Sigoda, Keith Mischo, and Barbara Bass, joined the committee to accomplish the task.

At the 16th Winter Deaflympics, 400 athletes from 25 countries with different types of sign language came to Utah to compete. Jeff Pollock basically noted that communication barriers was minimal, as the athletes used International Sign Language, a mix of various signs and gestures from different signed languages (Jarvik, *Deseret News*, January 31, 2007). Ben Soukup, chairman of the 16th Winter Deaflympics Board of Directors, noted that representatives from around the globe competed for gold, silver, and



bronze medals in five of the game's most popular winter sports: Alpine skiing, snowboarding, cross country skiing, ice hockey, and curling. He said it was a rare opportunity for the world's greatest Deaf athletes to compete each other for world-class status (Soukup, 2007).

In conclusion, Utah is fortunate to have hosted the 16th Winter Deaflympics where they could show off their 'Greatest Snow on Earth.' Not only that, Utah has another reason to be

proud of Salt Lake City becoming the world's first city to host all three International Olympic Committee sanctioned games – Olympics, Paralympics and Deaflympics. The Deaflympics event was a historic moment and it brought home fond memories of the visitors from all over the world.

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