



National Spotlight – Pittsburgh Hosts the 2005 Summer Senior Olympic Games

When the National Senior Games – also known as the Senior Olympics – come to town, some 10,000 athletes, aged 50 to 103, will prove that age is only a number. And they will also prove that it's never too late to achieve your dream – even if it's the bronze, silver and gold-medaled dream of Olympic competition.

For the first time ever, Pittsburgh will host this year's Summer National Senior Games from June 3-18, 2005. Dr. Peter Cohen, founding director of UPMC's Senior Sports and Fitness Program and his colleague, Dr. Freddie Fu, are the co-chairs of the Pittsburgh Local Organizing Committee (PLOC). This group launched our city's successful bid for hosting the Senior Olympics.

Explained Mars resident David White, executive director of the PLOC, "The Senior Games were started as way to focus on and help initiate healthy aging through exercise, fitness and education."

Held every two years, the Senior Olympics consist of an 18-sport competition for men and women over 50. Senior athletes from all across the country will compete in traditional and non-traditional Olympic sports, including archery, badminton, basketball, bowling, cycling, golf, horseshoes, racquetball, shuffleboard, softball, swimming, tennis and track and field.

Over 30,000 competitors registered for the 2005 Senior Games, and the final 10,000 qualifiers finished among the top two in their age group during last summer's state competitions. This year, over 400 local athletes will compete.

Joy Brewer is a 57-year-old middle school reading teacher from Zelienople. She fought and defeated cancer and also happens to be a state finalist in Women's 3-on-3 Basketball and Volleyball. Joy will compete in these sports during

the Senior Olympics this month.

When asked if it was okay to print her age, she quipped, "This is the one time where we're proud of our age."

Even though Joy was away from sports for many years, she proves that it is never too late to get involved. "I had not played for 20 years in any organized programs," she said, "and then I found out about senior athletic programs three years ago. My driving force is to stay active and to exercise."

Pine Township resident Kent Biggerstaff is the Director of Competition and Venues and was the Pittsburgh Pirates' Head Athletic Trainer for 22 years before retiring. When asked how senior athletes compare to the younger major-league athletes he used to train, he noted, "The desire to compete and win is very similar between the two age groups. Their effort is every bit as determined as other athletes throughout the country, whether it be high school, collegiate or professional."

The competition among the 19 cities considered to host the Senior Games was high. White stated, "One thing that made us a serious contender was the various services that are already provided to seniors within Allegheny County."

The Pittsburgh's Senior Olympics should be the start of an important trend for local seniors, inspiring healthy living through powerful and highly visible examples. "After these Games have come and gone," said White, "we want to leave the lasting impression to those seniors who live in the community that they should get out and participate in fitness activities."

Brewer agreed. "Regardless of their athletic experience or ability, if seniors have any interest at all in sports or exercise, this is a great way to keep active and have fun." And there are great bonuses – while staying fit, you can also socialize and build lasting friendships!

Since it's the first time the city has ever hosted a multi-sport event of this size, the Senior

Olympics will also help to promote the large-event-friendly qualities of Pittsburgh. Said White, "It puts us on the map and lays the foundation for government leaders to market our region as a viable option for these types of events."

This year's Senior Games leads a series of national events that will be hosted in Pittsburgh, including the Bass Master competition, the baseball All-Star Game and the golf U.S. Open. "The Senior Games is the first to show that Pittsburgh can successfully host events of this magnitude," White noted.

The North Hills will be one of the major focus areas of the Senior Games. In fact, competitions are scheduled in North Park, Northern Allegheny County and Cranberry Township. North Park alone will host the triathlon, four different cycling events, the 5k, 10k, 20k and 40k road races and the 5k Racewalk. In addition, ten North Hills fields will host the softball competitions.

Biggerstaff concluded, "Every organizing entity in the city and North Hills' Townships has been very supportive in helping us to put on good games." As a result, local hotels, restaurants and other businesses will benefit from not only the crowds that attend the Senior Games, but also from the possibility of future events being hosted in the region. The Senior Games are expected to attract over 25,000 athletes, their relatives and friends to the area.

All Senior Olympics sporting events are free and open to the public. Please come out and show your support for these active, dedicated, competitive and inspiring individuals. For more information about events and venues, visit: www.2005seniorgames.org/home.jsp, call 412-647-9519 or e-mail info@2005seniorgames.org.

Getting older no longer necessarily limits possibility; in fact, it can even sometimes make possibilities limitless. ❖

