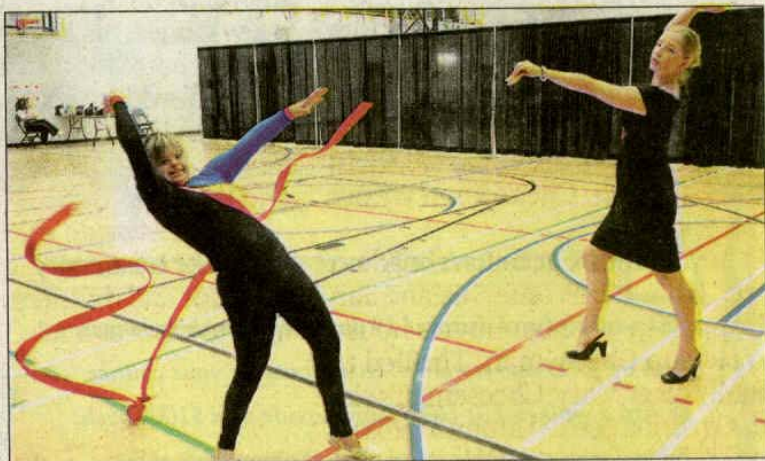


Calgary's Sarah Peterson crosses the finish line during the 50-metre sprint event in the 2009 Special Olympics Provincial Summer Games at Richard Fowler athletic park in St. Albert on Saturday. About 880 athletes converged in St. Albert for the Games. Events are expected to wrap up around 3 p.m. today, to be followed by closing ceremonies in Richard Fowler Park.

Rhythmic gymnast Carly McAvoy, 20, left, gets some tips from coach Cassy Chau during a break in the Rhythmic Gymnastics event at Servus Place in St. Albert during the Special Olympic Games.



# So many ways to win at Special Games

## 880 athletes and host of coaches, volunteers converge in St. Albert

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Katherine St. Amand was eager to trade her track shoes for dancing shoes at the Special Olympics Provincial Summer Games in St. Albert this weekend.

After a day of competition in swimming, track and field, bowling, rhythmic gymnastics, powerlifting, soccer and softball, many of the 880 athletes with intellectual disabilities were looking forward to the Special Olympics banquet and dance Saturday night in north Edmonton.

The social aspect of the Alberta games is a particularly big deal for St. Amand, 16, who has Asperger's syndrome. The form of autism makes it hard for St. Amand to interact with other people. On Saturday, St. Amand cheered loudly for other athletes at Fowler Park and hugged numerous friends.

"She is just so excited to be here," said her mother, Susan St. Amand. "It has improved her self-confidence and helps, of course, in her fitness level, and it's a nice social event because they meet so many new friends."

It is the first summer games for St. Amand, who travelled to Edmonton by bus Friday with her team from Calgary to compete in the 100-metre and 200-metre sprints, a relay,

### BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 880: Number of athletes at Alberta's 2009 summer games
- ▶ 700: Number of athletes at Alberta's 2005 summer games
- ▶ Nine: Number of athletes who represented Alberta in the last Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China, in 2007
- ▶ 114: Number of Alberta communities with Special Olympics programs
- ▶ 18.35: Kilograms of medals handed out at the games

the long jump and shot put. "It has just always been part of my life, even before this. I was always running and jumping as a little girl," she said.

For rhythmic gymnast Carly McAvoy, this weekend is about securing a spot on Team Alberta.

The 20-year-old from Beaumont has twice competed in the nationals for Special Olympics, once in rhythmic gymnastics and once in figure skating. She hopes to join about 130 Team Alberta athletes who will travel to London, Ont., in July 2010, for the summer games.

"She did a boot camp in Beaumont to help her get ready for these games," said her coach, Meg Smale. "She works hard — most of the time, right Carly?"

"I work even harder than you think," McAvoy, who has Down syn-

drome, shot back with a laugh."

Smale, who has volunteered with Special Olympics for 12 years, says the event is a family affair. Her mother and three of her four children have also helped out with the Games.

Volunteering offers travel opportunities — Smale has been to provincial and national events, as well as the World Games in Ireland in 2003 — but it's the advancement she sees closer to home that makes her work worthwhile, she says.

"I enjoy watching the athletes grow and develop," Smale said. "We've got one athlete who, for the first two years, she would sit by the door and hit people as they went by, and this year, she's out there competing."

This weekend gave Jodi Flanagan, chef de mission for Team Alberta, a chance to scout coaches and athletes who might be good candidates for the nationals next year in Ontario.

"There are a lot of these athletes who train as elite athletes would train," Flanagan said.

About 1,850 people attended the opening ceremonies at Servus Place in St. Albert Friday night to kick off the Special Olympics Provincial Summer Games, held every four years. A team of about 500 volunteers worked hard to make the games a success, said David Climenhaga, chairman of the organizing committee.

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