

**Chicagoan to Compete
in Special Olympics**
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Admin Cristea, 23, of Chicago has been chosen to compete in alpine skiing as part of Team USA at the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games. The Games will be held in the spectacular mountains of Boise, McCall and Sun Valley, Idaho February 7-13, 2009 and will include up to 3,000 athletes from more than 100 countries and 6,000 volunteers. Athletes will compete in seven Olympic-type sports: alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, figure skating, floor hockey, snowboarding, snowshoeing, and speed skating.

Cristea is among seven athletes and five coaches from Illinois on Team USA (see Illinois participants below), which will include approximately 450 athletes. The Illinois athletes are gold medal winners at the state level, who met the criteria for World Games and were selected in a random drawing for each sport slot. Team USA had a training camp at Copper Mountain, Colorado in early December.

Admin Cristea's life changed dramatically when he and his family left Communist Romania in 1990 when he was 5 years old. After a stop at a refugee camp in Vienna, they came to Chicago where his mother had family. Cristea did not discover Special Olympics for another seven years, but once he did, he became an 8-sport athlete, training and competing in alpine skiing, basketball, softball, soccer, aquatics, volleyball, floor

hockey and athletics (track & field). Cristea trains and competes through Special Children's Charities' programming at the Chicago Park District's Welles Park, and lives in the Forest Glen/Jefferson Park neighborhood.

"We're very pleased and proud to have Admin representing the United States at the World Games," said his father, Gelu Cristea. "In Romania, I felt people looked down on you if you had a family member with a disability. In the United States, there are so many opportunities for them," he said.

Cristea's coach at Welles Park, Rose Rivers, says that Admin has really improved his hand-eye coordination through alpine skiing, in addition to building his strength. His father attributes that strength in part to the work Admin does for the family construction business, breaking up concrete, for instance. Admin says Special Olympics has helped give him more confidence and he looks forward to competing and improving at World Games, with his mother and father cheering him on. The family spends vacation time in the winter skiing in Wisconsin. Admin graduated from Northside Learning Center in Chicago in 2006.

The Special Olympics World Games, held every two years and alternating between summer and winter games, are much more than just a sporting event. In addition to showcasing the skills and achievements of Special Olympics athletes, the 2009 World Games will embody the movement's messages of acceptance and inclusion. These Games will bring together heads of state, celebrities and leaders in the fields of education, healthcare, business and sports to witness firsthand Special Olympics' ability to transform communities and the lives of more than 190 million people worldwide with intellectual disabilities. The 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games were held in Shanghai, China and the 2011 World Summer Games will be in Athens.

The Illinois Delegation to Team USA for the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games includes:

Admin Cristea of Chicago, Athlete, Alpine skiing
Chad Gatlin of Peoria Heights, Athlete, Speed skating
Susan McCollum of Naperville, Athlete, Figure skating
Theresa McLachlan of LaSalle, Athlete, Cross-country skiing
Mark Oftedahl of Bolingbrook, Athlete, Snowshoeing
Savannah Smith of Carmi, Athlete, Snowshoeing
Andy Compton of Mt. Prospect, Coach, Snowshoeing
Larry Needham of Pekin, Coach, Figure skating
Barbara Needham of Pekin, Coach, Speed skating
Karin Webster of Decatur, Coach, Snowshoeing
Dean Wilson of Galena, Coach, Snowshoeing
Maggie Dittburner of Bloomington, Sport Manager Cross-country skiing, Team USA
Michele Henson of Bloomington, Communications Director, Team USA

Plus: Sean McNamee of Alsip Official Floor hockey