

America The Bountiful

Utah Families Take Olympic Hosting To Heart

(NAPSA)—As Salt Lake City is playing host to the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in February, more than a thousand Salt Lake-area families are readying their homes for some personal hosting of their own. The Samsung Athlete Family Homestay Program, a service that matches volunteer host families in Salt Lake with the families of athletes competing at the Games, will give hundreds of families the chance to share the Olympic dream together in Salt Lake. The program provides the families of competing athletes—from both the U.S. and abroad—with free housing, meals and transportation. During the Games, more than a thousand Salt Lake-area families will participate as hosts, and officials expect guest families from more than 30 countries to take advantage of the offer.

Families of athletes are often spotted in the crowd by cameras and attain semi-celebrity status during the Games. Karch Kiraly's flag-waving father and Bonnie Blair's "Blair Bunch" are two of the most memorable, but many fans may not be aware that even the families of high-profile athletes are often forced to pay their own way to the Games. Blair, the most-decorated Winter Olympian in U.S. history, remembers the high costs associated with her

family's trek to Lillehammer, Norway for the 1992 Winter Games.

"Many of my family members would not have attended if it weren't for the family host program," said Blair, whose family was hosted during both the 1988 and 1992 Olympic Winter Games. "Everything was so expensive and they just weren't prepared for all the costs."

Since the program's inception, thousands of athlete families have benefited from the generosity of local families in Olympic host cities. In addition, many families and athletes have developed long-lasting relationships with their guest and host families. Blair and her family still stay in touch with the host family from Calgary.

"We see them almost every time we're in Calgary," Blair said. "It's great to catch up and see how each other's families are doing."

The Salt Lake 2002 Olympic Games will mark the third time that Samsung has sponsored the Athlete Family Homestay program, following the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Samsung is also involved in several other on-site Olympic programs, including the "Spirit of Sport" Essay Contest, the Share the Moment Call Program and the Community Olympic Development Program.