

Olympic spirit a family affair

Norman Wells clan a part of the Games

by **Katie May**
Northern News Services
Lli Goline/Norman Wells

Every four years, the Balanuik family gathers around their television set to cheer on Team Canada at the Winter Olympics. This year, they'll be much closer to the action.

Siblings Sara and Jordon and their parents Dave and Karen have all signed on to support the Olympic spirit in one way or another.

First, Jordon, 18, ran with the torch in Yellowknife this winter. Then, 22-year-old Sara was accepted as a Youth Ambassador volunteer for the Paralympics and decided to volunteer for the Olympics as well. She is scheduled to fly next month to Vancouver, where mom Karen has already accepted a position as staff manager of Northern House – a promotional location intended to raise awareness of the North and increase tourism – until the end of April. Meanwhile, Dave is holding down the fort at home in Norman Wells, where the family has lived for 16 years. However, he plans to visit his wife when the Games begin.

"I'm proud of them," Dave said. "It was great to see Jordon participate, and of course Sara – she's a real diplomat and she's a great spokesman for the North."

Dave doesn't have tickets to the Games, but he said "just being in the city is going to be great – just to feel the spirit."

Sara was watching the Norman Wells community

channel in December 2008 when a notice came up inviting young people to apply for the Olympics' Youth Ambassador volunteer program.

"I was always really into the Olympics. We always watched the Olympics as a family growing up and when I heard about the chance to be a part of it, I had to jump on it and at least try," she said. "I definitely couldn't do it without my parents; they're going to be keeping up my payments since it's a volunteer position – two months without work is a long time."

As one of about 25 youth ambassadors for NWT, Sara completed two weeks of training with officials from the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, working on communication and media skills and doing things "to make sure we were representing ourselves and our territory as best as we can."

She'll receive her official assignments when she arrives, but Sara said she's been told she'll be part of the closing ceremonies.

"I'm really excited for that," she said, adding she hopes to meet lots of other volunteers and get ideas for the Norman Wells youth centre, where she works with fellow Olympics volunteer, Myles Erb.

"I just feel like the skills that I'll learn at the Olympics will help me in furthering our youth centre," she said. "I can't wait to go and bring back the knowledge that I learn there and apply it in my community."



Katie May/NNSL photo

Sara Balanuik, 22, of Norman Wells is volunteering at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games next month. She has also been accepted to volunteer at the Paralympic Games as part of the Olympics Youth Ambassador program.

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