

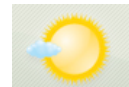
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Synchronized skaters



Skaters prepare for three-day Synchronized Skating competition.

[View the video](#)

VIDEO: Morris to host skating event

Thursday, January 29, 2009

BY RICHARD COWEN

NorthJersey.com

STAFF WRITER



Today, the William G. Mennen Sports Arena in Morris County will be at center ice for what organizers promise to be a milestone for the fast-growing sport of synchronized skating.



CHRIS PEDOTA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A team from Morris County practices for the East Coast Regional Synchronized Skating Championship, to be held at Mennen Arena later this week.

would draw 2,000 people in total. Despite the depressed economy, we are overjoyed that 2,000 skaters alone will be competing, and a few thousand others will be watching."

The competition, which begins this afternoon and runs through Saturday, has drawn athletes and their families from Maine to Florida. The Morris County tourism office says hotel rooms are sold out for the weekend — a much-needed boost for area businesses, especially restaurants.

Synchronized skating

* Tickets for the Eastern Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships can be purchased at the box office of the William G. Mennen Sports Arena, on East Hanover Avenue in Morris Township.

* Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$8 for seniors and children.

* The winners advance to the national

More than 2,000 skaters and 138 teams are expected to compete in the Eastern Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships, believed to be the largest tournament ever held for a sport that began 50 years ago and is seeking to grow its way into the Olympics.

"The event is on course to far exceed our expectations," said Pat Lynch, member of the host club, The Skating Club of Morris, and the chairwoman of the Eastern championships. "When we announced that the Easterns would be held in Morris Township a few months ago, we expected that it

"In my 11 years at the visitors center, this has to be one of the largest events," said Leslie Bensley, director of the Morris County Visitors Center. "It's a great example of the kind of business we need."

Bensley said that studies have shown that for every dollar a tourist spends in Morris County, 86 cents goes to local businesses. The visitor's center plans to distribute 200 goody bags to out-of-state

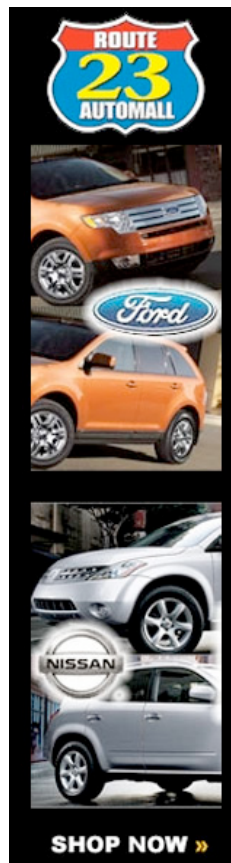
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championship in Portland, Maine, March 3 through March 7. teams, which contain discount coupons for restaurants and a guide to museums and other attractions in Morris County, including the historic

Jockey Hollow National Park.

Synchronized Skating, which is governed by U.S. Figure Skating, involves teams of eight to 20 girls, attempting to move in unison on the ice in time to music. A panel of judges rates each program on a 6.0 scale — just like Olympic figure skating events. Teams compete in different age groups, with the youngest girls being about age 6, and the oldest about 19. There is also a Masters division for older skaters.

But unlike Olympic figure skating, which celebrates individual talent through the freestyle and pairs competition, synchronized skating stresses teamwork. All it takes is one skater out of time for the routine to be out of sync.

"It's really fun because you get to do it with a group," said Gabrielle Goodwin, a 10-year-old from Wayne who is a member of Precisely Right, a Morris County team that uses Mennen Arena as its home ice. "Instead of by yourself, when you get all nervous."

The first synchronized skating team formed in Ann Arbor, Mich., in 1954. But it wasn't until 30 years later that the United States held its first synchronized skating championship in Bowling Green, Ohio, with 38 teams participating.

Since then, the sport has grown steadily and now has more than 8,000 skaters on 525 teams nationwide. U.S. Figure Skating hopes to one day make it an Olympic event, but has told skaters the sport needs to become more popular around the world before the International Olympic Committee would consider adding it to the Winter Games.

Lynch, who has been with The Skating Club of Morris for nearly 30 years, said the Mennen Arena hosted the Eastern sectionals once before, in 1991. Since then, the county-owned arena has added a third rink, built in 2002, to handle increasing demand for ice time. All three rinks will be used to accommodate the 138 teams participating in the sectionals.

Rinks submit bids to U.S. Figure Skating to host the sectionals. Lynch was delighted when U.S. Figure Skating named Mennen as this year's host. Since then, she's spent about \$200,000 to put on the event.

"I think U.S. Figure Skating liked the fact that we had three rinks," Lynch said. "They knew we could handle it. That, plus the fact that we are centrally located between Maine and Florida."

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