

## Butte / Area

# Bonnie's back in Butte to stay

### Medalist to lead parade, attend Tech on scholarship

By John McNay  
Standard Staff Writer  
Olympic gold medalist Bonnie Blair, back in town to be one of the grand marshals of the Butte Fourth of July Parade, Wednesday was named the first recipient of a scholarship for speedskaters.

Blair said she plans to major in applied health science at Montana Tech and have a minor in business administration. She said she is just a few credits short of completing her sophomore year. She attended Tech two summers ago and has other credits from the junior college in her hometown of Champlain, Ill.

At a news conference Wednesday morning, Blair said she has opted to stay in Butte "because of a combination of a lot of things."

She said she wants to continue to skate but wants to slow the pace.

It was "like a weight lifted off my shoulders after the Olympics," Blair said. "Things have been just crazy since I got back."

Going to college full-time will require that she mainly go to meets only on the weekends in North America, she said. The only European meet she plans to compete in is the World Championships in February in The Netherlands.

Butte has some particular attractions for her that ruled out Calgary and Milwaukee, including her boyfriend Dave Silk, her coach Mike Crowe, the U.S. High Altitude Sports Center, and the scholarship. Blair even said the weather in Butte is better for speedskating than the rink at Milwaukee.

Jim Murphy, chairman of the board of directors of the U.S. High Altitude Speedskating Foundation, said the scholarship is "a new dimension of support for skaters who are trying to meet educational and competition goals."

The grant is sponsored by the law firm of Poore, Roth and Robinson.

Don Robinson of the firm said the U.S. High Altitude Sports Center Scholarship will be reviewed for future recipients who are Olympic

team members and want to continue their education at Montana Tech. He said the law firm wanted to show its support for speedskating and the sports center and decided the scholarship would be a good way to do that.

The scholarship provides for full tuition and books and should amount to about \$1,500 a year, Robinson said.

Robinson and Murphy encouraged other Butte area businesses to consider a similar approach for other athletes looking to further their education while they train in Butte.

"This is a very important positive step in helping skaters train and go to school," said Judy Martz, sports center director. "It enhances two major Butte resources — Montana Tech and the Sports Center."

Blair won the gold in the 500-meter speedskating competition in Calgary with a time of :39.10 seconds. She also won the bronze medal in the 1,000-meter and took fourth place in the 1,500.

Blair also holds the U.S. High Altitude Sports Center record at 500 meters with a :39.76 in the World Cup meet held here last November. That time is the fastest ever skated by a woman on an American rink.

Winning the gold has enabled her to do a lot of things and go a lot of places that she wouldn't have been able to do otherwise, she said.

One of her most memorable times, she said, was at a state dinner in honor of the Canadian prime minister that President Ronald Reagan was attending.

She said she thought she would be just one of 500 other people there and never even see the president.

Instead, she and eight others sat at a table with the president.

"It was a lot of fun," Blair said, noting that the president told stories and jokes during the meal. "He was just like anybody else."

She has made various other appearances, including throwing the first pitch out for the Chicago White Sox and at the home opener for the Chicago Cubs.

At the Indianapolis 500, she was on hand as one of a number of other "celebrities."

"That's what they called me. I have a hard time thinking of myself like that," Blair said with her quick and ready smile.



**SPORTS CENTER** Director Judy Martz stands on the unfinished second floor of the 22,000-square-foot training building. Martz said the center is continuing to seek donations. "What we

need is a company to adopt speedskating like 7-11 has adopted bicycling," Martz said, of the convenience food chain that has poured millions into that sport. (Staff photo)

## Sports center needs more volunteers to get in shape for winter competitions

Plans are to have half of the U.S. High Altitude Sports Center training building substantially completed by November, Director Judy Martz said Wednesday.

That means having the building closed in and the first floor finished in the way of locker rooms and offices, she said. The large two-story building has 11,000 square feet on each floor.

The second floor will remain unfinished while fundraising continues, she said.

Well over \$2 million has been expended on the facility so far, Martz said.

But, to have the facility's first floor largely completed by November, it will require a volun-

teer effort similar to that which preceded the World Cup last November.

She said the speedskating rink will be used early in the winter by the Montana Amateur Speedskating Association and the American team will be training there again.

**THE NEXT WORLD CUP** will be Feb. 8-9, and feature about 40 of the best women skaters in the world, but no men this time, Martz said.

She said the Western International competition is set for Jan. 21-22 and a National meet will be Jan. 28-29.

She said that speedskating is getting more popular all the time

and it will likely be necessary to start bidding the World Cups two years in advance.

One reason for the growing popularity, she said, is the success of the Butte center.

Martz said she was happy that Olympic gold medal winner Bonnie Blair has decided to accept a High Altitude Sports Center Scholarship to attend Montana Tech and that Blair has expressed interest in helping the sports center development.

"I think it will be a great help to us to have Bonnie here. Especially when the best in the world is agreeing" that the sports center can grow to be the best facility of its kind in the world, Martz said.