There is just one year to go before the biennial Alice Springs Masters Games (ASMG) celebrates its 10th competition, Minister for Sport and Recreation John Ah Kit said today.

First held in 1986, the ASMG was the first event of its type in Australia, which started with 1000 competitors in a handful of sports.

In 2004, the event will be held for the 10th time with thousands of competitors and accompanying people expected to attend the Central Australian event from 16-23 October.

"It is more significant than just a celebration – it will continue the status of the Alice Springs Masters Games as the original and best event that caters for mature aged sportspeople," Minister Ah Kit said.

"It is a remarkable achievement for this regional Australian event especially as they compete in a vigorous market place with more than 10 other Masters Games around Australia – some of which have come and gone."

Former TV host Daryl Somers - who attended the 2002 ASMG as a honorary ambassador – was a special guest at the one-year-to-go countdown function, expressing his support for the Central Australian event.

"Daryl had such a great time last year that he wants to come back for more in 2004 if his time permits," Minister Ah Kit said.

"The competitors enjoyed Daryl’s presence at the 2002 Games, and combined with our patron Dawn Fraser, it brings some extra prestige to the Alice Springs Masters Games."

Minister Ah Kit said planning for the 2004 event had begun immediately after the successful 2002 Games.

"An Advisory Committee, chaired again by Peter Hoey and with representatives from the local community, has been established and meets monthly to oversee Games operations," Minister Ah Kit said.

"We have also several major sponsors renewing their support including the Peter Kittle Motor Company, the Alice Springs Town Council, Imparja Television and Lasseters Hotel Casino signing up to support the Games, which includes financial and in-kind support."

"And sport coordinators for more than 30 sports will be busy over the next few months to ensure the Alice Springs Masters Games remains a tremendous success.

An independent economic evaluation of the 2002 Alice Springs Masters Games estimated $7.5 million was directly contributed to the local economy.