



JENNIFER LENAIN/SPECIAL TO THE SUN HERALD

Jerry West carries the Special Olympics torch at the Area III Games at Stennis Space Center on Saturday.

# Stennis hosts Special Olympics Area III Games

By JENNIFER LENAIN

Special to the Sun Herald

## STENNIS SPACE CENTER

— Going for the gold, or for blue ribbons, more than 150 athletes of all ages competed at the 2014 Stennis Space Center Area III Special Olympic Games on Saturday morning.

There was something for everyone, with events such as the 50-meter dash to the standing long jump and even the softball throw.

“We look forward to this every year,” said Dave Golden, Area III Special Olympic Games chairman. “It’s so rewarding for the athletes and volunteers alike.

“It’s such a good way to spend a Saturday.”

## Proud to participate

Carrying the Special Olympics torch for the second year in a row, Jerry West, 44, led the March of the Athletes to the opening ceremony.

West said marching with the torch is a tribute to his mother, Connie West, who died in March. “She used to watch me compete in every game.”

Competing in the Games for his 20th year, West said, “I love it. It’s people like

me and it’s all ages of us out there.”

With as many volunteers as athletes, each participant had their own team cheering them on.

First-time volunteer Karen Whitfield of Picayune accompanied members of the Saint Francis Bridgeway Community to the games. “They’re all so excited and anxious,” Whitfield said before the start of the opening ceremony.

Kelsey Thompson with Cheshire Group Home said the athletes “look forward to the competition and train all year.”

## Opportunity to advance

Athletes competing in the Area III Games can qualify to participate in the state games, and may advance even further.

“This is a qualifying event,” Golden said. “These athletes can eventually work their way to national events.”

“If I win today, I’ll get to compete in May,” West said, hoping to make it to the Keesler Air Force Base State Summer Games. By the end of the Games, West had earned two blue ribbons for the 50-yard dash and the softball throw.