

Military spend day with Special Olympians

By MC2 Flordeliz Valerio and Penny Randall
Staff Writers

Buses filled with students, teachers, and their parents lined the road to the front gate of Naval Air Station Meridian on a perfect sunny day of Sept. 30. At the same time, volunteers were gathering at the installations youth center for the opening ceremony of this year's Area 5 Special Olympics Fall Games.

Nearly 250 athletes from 22 schools from Clarke, Kemper, Newton and Lauderdale counties participated in this year's games.

The ceremony began as NAS Meridian Executive Officer Cmdr. Ed Donohoe welcomed guests and athletes, followed by the presentation of colors by the Ceremonial Detail Team. Chief Aviation Structural Mechanic Tonjala Chavious had the honor of reading the Special Olympics Oath and was assisted by two Special Olympic athletes from the audience.

"Let me win...but if I cannot win... let me brave in the attempt," was shouted out by everyone.

Due to construction at the fitness center, events were held in several different locations. The youth center was home to events such as softball skills, soccer skills and basketball. Other events included golf

at Ponta Creek Golf Course and bowling at McCain Rec Center. A team of military and civilian personnel from the 186th Air Refueling Wing treated athletes to equestrian and wagon rides near the pool. Students from Naval Technical Training Center volunteered to assist with events.

"I always liked helping out with Special Olympics," said Logistics Specialist Seaman Apprentice Andrew Mendenall. "When I was in high school I did it. It is a good opportunity to get out and help the community."

Other volunteers taught soccer basics including controlling the ball and kicking the ball to the goalie, and how to playing defense-offense at the basketball court.

Yeoman Seaman Kyle Burt said he jumped at the change to help at the Special Olympic games.

"When our instructors mentioned the event and were asking for volunteers I knew I wanted to help," Burt said. "I love seeing the kids enjoy themselves. They don't care if there are first or last - they just want to participate and have fun."

Kendra Goodman, the mother of Special Olympic athlete Matthew Goodman, said it was her 15-year-old sons third year to participate.

"He gets to take part and just have fun," Goodman said. "He always looks for-

ward to riding the horses."

Special Education teacher Todd Brown from Newton County School brought 22 athletes that range in age from 13 to 17 to the fall games.

"The kids love getting out of the classroom and interacting with other children," Brown said. "It teaches them social skills and that it's okay to just have fun."

Special Olympics is a year-round international program continuous sports training and competition, designed to increase physical fitness, cooperation social skills, competition and self-esteem for disabled people. The Special Olympics serves approximately two million intellectually and physically challenged individuals in a wide variety of programs in more than 150 countries. The Special Olympics program is divided into five levels: local area, state, region, national and international.

Helena Poe, a teacher from West Kemper Elementary School in DeKalb, said it the event is a great opportunity for the children.

"It is a chance for the children to participate in sports, where they normally do not get a chance to," Poe said. "They get to experience outdoor activities with other children who are the same age as them and also show off their skills."