

# Special Olympians are motivated Marine style

By Penny Randall

Editor

It was a chilly, windy day at the Area 8 Special Olympic games on March 31, but that didn't dampen the spirits of nearly 200 children and 125 volunteers from Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One who were there to assist the athletes.

The games opened with the traditional torch run featuring police and sheriff department personnel from the local area, which was followed by the Special Olympic oath recited by all the athletes.

Pfc. Julius Din assisted Newton County Middle School student Jeremy Key during the day's events.

"I think he's really cool," said Key referring to Pfc. Din.

Pfc. Beau Vrbas assisted Joe Romero who competed in the motorized wheelchair race.

"He told me he loves to race and play racing video games," said Vrbas, a student at MATSS-1. "This is the first time I've ever volunteered at Special Olympics. It's great -- I'm so glad we got to come out and do something good for the community. It helps the kids most of all, but I truly think we all learn something about ourselves at events like this."

Meridian High School Special Education Teacher Melissa Moody said she was thrilled with the olympic games.

"It's great for our students," Moody said. "Special Olympics is a place they see their friends and former teachers. They enjoy this so much."

In addition to 125 volunteers from MATSS-1, the 186th Air Refueling Wing supplied 40 volunteers to assist with the games which included track and field events, tennis ball throw, softball throw and standing long jump.

Pfc. Jacob Hinkle assisted at the tennis ball throw.

"This is great," Hinkle said. "When my instructor told us we were coming out here, I was thrilled. I've never seen anything like this before. The event is making the kids so happy. I think this is a great way to increase the awareness of children with disabilities in the community and this is an awesome way to spend the day."

Eriel Tingle, a second grader at Poplar Springs Elementary, said he loved his new Marine friend, Pfc. Kayse Aguilar.

"They are so nice to us," said Tingle who earned a first place ribbon in the 50 meter run. "She helped me win the race."

Pfc. Aguilar said she would never forget her experience at Special Olympics.

"I try to motivate them just like the Marine Corps motivates me," Aguilar said.