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Running for Glory

Placer County well represented in Torch Relay

By Roger Phelps -- Neighbors Staff Writer
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Contests in the Olympic Games draw champions from many areas.

Originally, a regional champion was the most skilled in the military arts, a fighter who served a community by defending it in battle.

This year's Olympic Torch Relay also will gather people who are recognized for serving their communities. Three are from Placer County.

Symbolizing the spirit of the 2002 Olympic Games, the torch relay will cover a 13,500-mile route around the United States.

Among runners selected to bear the torch along .2-mile segments of the route in California are Andre Sims of Auburn and Joe Wuelfing of Rocklin. To become a torchbearer, a person must be formally nominated.

Sims is a karate instructor and a founder of the Auburn Boys and Girls Club.

"One of my students' mothers heard or read about the torch relay -- heard they were looking for people who were community-minded or who had made a difference in someone's life," Sims said. "It started with the way I worked with her son, who is of grade-school age. He started taking karate, and his attitude changed. He got disciplined.

"I think karate does that, gives kids a sense of focus and discipline," Sims said



Joe Wuelfing of Rocklin holds one of the commemorative torches that each runner will use.

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of the martial art that originated in Japan.

"I also helped start the Boys and Girls Club, and somehow a letter-writing campaign started. It just snowballed," he said. "I'm quite honored."

Olympic Games representatives in Olympia, Greece, this fall lighted the Olympic Torch and sent it on its way to Atlanta, Ga., the most recent site in the United States to hold the Olympic Games. Relay runners in Atlanta on Dec. 4 started the torch on a 65-day trip that will end in Salt Lake City, site of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games from Feb. 8-24.

Also representing Placer in the relay will be Joe Wuelfing, who with his wife, Janis, established a foundation that helps fund care for infants who fall ill.

"I was nominated by my Aunt Anne, from Pioneer, Calif.," Wuelfing said. "A couple of years ago, my wife and I established a foundation named for our infant son, Markie, who passed away. We were helped so much by hospice caregivers. We've done a lot of fund raising for infants through the Markie Foundation."

With such a great distance for the flame to travel before it reaches Northern California, organizers haven't been able to tell Wuelfing, Sims and O'Brien precisely when or where they will carry the Olympic Torch.

"We'll find out about three weeks beforehand," Wuelfing said. "It will probably be either the 19th or 20th of January. They gave me a list of five cities between Rocklin and Walnut Creek (in Contra Costa County). Hopefully, it will be somewhere close to the Sacramento area."

About the Writer

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Andre Sims of Auburn is among the people from Placer County who will participate in the Olympic Torch Relay leading up the Winter Olympics in February in Salt Lake City.

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