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Spokane

Not your ordinary torchbearers

Olympic flame to be carried by inspirational and helping members of the community

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The athletes competing next month in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City will have the world's attention. Their stories will be told over and over on television, in newspapers and in magazines.

But few following the Olympics will be aware of the thousands of ordinary Americans who have carried the Olympic Torch in a relay that began in Atlanta last year and ends next month in Salt Lake City, where the games run Feb. 8-24.

That flame will wind its way through Spokane on Thursday. Fifty-nine runners will carry the torch on an 11 1/2-mile jaunt through the city, beginning at 5 p.m. They were nominated as inspirational people by family, friends, and co-workers, and chosen by the city of Spokane and three national organizations including a committee of Olympic officials.

Torchbearers include people like Tom Higgins, who was paralyzed from the neck down when he stepped into the path of a speeding sled while trying to get a child out of the way.

And no Olympic Torch run through Spokane would be complete without Don Kardong. A fourth-place finisher in the marathon in the 1976 Olympics, Kardong is the founder of Bloomsday; the largest timed race in the country.

Other torchbearers are people whose lives have presented them with tremendous physical and emotional challenges. And others in the group have dedicated their lives to serving others.

Here is one of those people and the reasons he was chosen to carry the torch:



Bruno Kensok carries the Olympic Torch in Spokane

Bruno Kensok

At 80, Kensok has been married to his wife, Viola "Vi" Kensok, for 55 years, has four children, 14 grandchildren and 4 great-grand children.

His life has been dedicated to serving others. Before retiring, Kensok earned a living as a counselor for developmentally disabled children for 33 years. In addition, he spent roughly 50 years working as a volunteer for the St. Vincent de Paul Society, distributing food and clothing for the needy.

In 1992 he was selected Spokane County's Volunteer of the Year. Two years later he went to India and worked with a program founded by Mother Teresa intended to help the poor in that country.

When asked why he chose his life's path, Kensok replied: "I really can't put a finger on it. I guess I just had a feel for people less fortunate than me. I enjoyed working with the less privileged."

Even in his alleged retirement, Kensok spends five hours a day, Monday through Friday, at St. Vincent de Paul. But come Thursday he's going to have to find some time to carry the torch.

"It's an honor to be a part of this," Kensok said. "It's a once in a lifetime thing."