

# Bearers of the Torch

## 2002 Olympic flame lights up Santa Cruz on Friday



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Women's national handcycling champion Monica Bascio will carry the Olympic torch in Santa Cruz on Friday.

### Events

**K**athy Matejka will rise many hours before dawn Friday for one of the shortest but one of the most meaningful runs of her life. The Scotts Valley resident will follow in the footsteps of boxing legend Muhammad Ali, figure skating Olympic gold medalist Peggy Fleming and speedskating star Bonnie Blair.

In the morning chill, Matejka will slip into her pristine new uniform mailed from Olympic headquarters last week:

a crisp, white windbreaker, matching wind pants, a long-sleeve white shirt, a fleecy white hat and gloves, all emblazoned with colorful corporate logos and graphics.

By **KAREN KEFAUVER**

Special to the Sentinel

She will arrive in Marina at 4:30 a.m. for a briefing. At 6:07 a.m., she will grasp a torch made of glass, silver and copper and begin the .2-mile run that will make her part of Olympic history.

"I could be running at 2 a.m. by myself and it would still be incredible to be part of this," said Matejka, who is a member of the Santa Cruz Triathlon Association.

Matejka, a cancer survivor, is one of 11,500 people nationally and 60 locally who have been selected to run a portion of the Salt Lake City 2002 Olympic Torch Relay.

In Santa Cruz, the torch relay will start at 7:35 a.m. Friday at West Cliff Drive and Swift Street, go past the Lighthouse, onto the Santa Cruz Wharf, to the Boardwalk, down Pacific Avenue and end at City Hall, where at an 8:40 a.m. ceremony an

official proclamation will be given. The Olympic flame's journey began on Dec. 4 in Atlanta, when Ali lit the first torch from a cauldron at the Olympic Centennial Park.

The relay takes the flame 13,500 miles through all the states except Minnesota, the Dakotas and Hawaii to the opening of the Winter Games, which run Feb. 8-28.

More than 500 nominations were submitted for the 60 spots. Each candidate had to be nominated with an essay detailing why that person was an inspiration.

Santa Cruz locals — athletes and non-athletes alike — will participate in the torch's cross country tour. This is the first time the Olympic torch has passed through Santa Cruz County.

Matejka won't be lonely during the Olympic Torch Relay. Each runner is trailed by a support team of four people, along with a caravan of nearly two dozen vehicles that includes the police and media.

In November, the fit 45-year-old completed her third Ironman Triathlon, a 2.4-

mile ocean swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run. "I am carrying the flame for a large community."

Three Santa Cruz Olympic relay members, all talented athletes, explain what being a torch bearer means to them.

### Kathy Matejka

Matejka learned three months ago she had been chosen to carry the torch, but she only recently found out her stretch of run will be in Marina. (She will be starting at the corner of Del Monte Boule-

vard and Reservation Road at 6:07 a.m.)

Area residents were warned they could be assigned to run anywhere in the stretch between Carmel and Santa Cruz.

"I will show up at 4:30 a.m. It's just like being in the Ironman. It's a delicious irony! I have to be up and early," said Matejka, who is more accustomed to the 26.2 miles of a marathon than the .2 mile, which is a little less than one lap around a track.

"I came home from work one day and I found a Fed Ex envelope from Nebraska," recalled Matejka, a park maintenance worker with the Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department for the past four years. "I don't know anyone in Nebraska! Then the first words I

see are, 'Congratulations! You have been selected to be a torch bearer in the Olympic Relay.' I went 'Oh my god!'"

"...I was freaked out. I was very honored and humbled. I didn't know how it happened."

She was nominated by Lori Meyer and Debbie Curtis, two friends who each submitted essays.

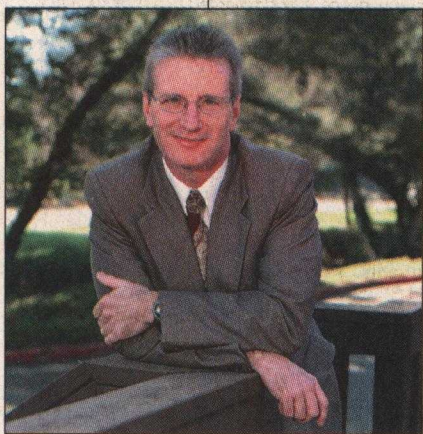
Both women knew of Matejka's challenges with the Ironman and surviving cancer. In the fall of 1990, Matejka was diagnosed with oral cancer and underwent surgery in spring 1991. She had a devastating recurrence and chose to undergo a second very complicated and brand-new surgery, which led to the removal of most of her tongue.

Her soft-tissue implant made her wonder whether she would be able to eat or speak. Also, the massive and intensive radiation, speech therapy and slow physical rehabilitation caused her to shed 55 pounds, leaving her with out of shape and with no endurance.

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Special to the Sentinel  
Triathlete  
Kathy Matejka  
is a cancer survivor.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel  
Lt. Harry Bidleman of the Scotts Valley Police Department is a coordinator for Special Olympics events.



# Torch

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"To get off the Lazy Boy to go to the front door was my exercise," she said. In 1992 — a year after finishing radiation therapy — Matejka competed in her first triathlon, the all women's Danskin race in San Jose. "I crossed the finish line and burst into tears. I love the sport."

She's been training ever since, competing in her first Ironman in 1997.

She will race the Florida Ironman again in November, but this time she will have had a taste of the Olympics.

"I almost feel like this is my Olympics. I am a part of it. I have been into athletics all my life. Sports are part of my being. I have been to Greece and ancient Olympia. This makes it all come full circle."

"I have the deepest respect for the Olympic Games and the Olympic ideal. A little piece of Olympics will stay right here in Santa Cruz."

## Harry Bidleman

After 21 years in the Scotts Valley Police Department, not much can surprise Lt. Harry Bidleman. But the Scotts Valley resident was astonished when he found out a month ago he would be a torch bearer.

His wife and daughter had both nominated him, unbeknownst to the other.

For Bidleman, 45, the 2-mile distance won't be too tough. He has a decade of running under his belt. Because of knee problems, he has now shifted into triathlon and competes in three or four races a year.

One of the highlights of his athletic

and professional career has been running and coordinating the Law Enforcement Torch Run for the Special Olympics for Northern California.

Also, in 1999, Bidleman was chosen as the runner to represent California at the Special Olympics World Games. That event involves a seven- to eight-mile run.

On Friday, he will run from Pacific Garden Mall to City Hall, the last section before the 8:40 a.m. ceremony.

"I am really honored," said the father of three and a member of the Santa Cruz Triathlon Association. "It's kind of neat because it brings together some of the stuff I love. It makes me think of the Special Olympics, running, the Santa Cruz community. I am proud to represent law enforcement, and being a member of the triathlon club community brings it together on many levels."

His enthusiasm doesn't end there.

"The Olympics represent hope and unity and all the nations coming together. This torch relay is the prelude to the Games. I am sure I will watch the Games with a little more interest this year, knowing I was a little tiny part of that."

## Monica Bascio

Santa Cruz resident Monica Bascio, 32, knew she had been nominated as a torch bearer, yet it still came as a total surprise to her when she learned she was accepted in the summer.

"I was really touched to have so many nominations by about 15 people. It was so flattering. It is an honor to be selected."

A 1992 snow skiing accident left her paralyzed from the waist down, but over

the past two years, Bascio has risen to the top of the sport of handcycling.

"This nomination is a culmination of community support — that makes it more of an honor," said Bascio, who is the women's national handcycling champion in road race, time trial and criterium.

On Friday, Bascio will roll down West Cliff Drive with the torch in her handcycle. For the past two years, Bascio has been a team member of Sport Aid, the Georgia-based equipment supply company that supports wheelchair sports through their team.

"Disabled cycling is a hugely growing sport within wheelchair sports," explained Bascio, who has been trying to get into the Paralympics. Because a large number of people want to compete, it's been tough even for her to make it.

Though she takes two months off — November and December — Bascio packs the rest of the year with a demanding schedule. During peak training, she logs 120 miles a week, training five days a week. Her first big race of the season is a Lance Armstrong benefit in Austin, Texas, in April.

She competes in about 10 races a year, including a weeklong stage race in Alaska.

"Racing is a huge commitment," said Bascio. "I am so grateful to have a flexible workplace."

A trained occupational therapist, Bascio is the program director at Front Street Inc., a residential facility for mental health rehabilitation.

"I will carry the torch with such a sense of pride. I really know what it takes to be a professional athlete and the dedication that goes into that. It is just so meaningful to me because I can

relate to what these athletes do. I thank the people who nominated me and for recognizing the spirit of Olympics. What could be greater than that?"

## Torch relay schedule

Santa Cruz will share in the Olympic spirit Friday by hosting a portion of the torch run for the first time.

Spectators are invited to watch the relay, runners and attend the public ceremony.

**What:** The Salt Lake City 2002 Olympic Torch Relay.

**Who:** Sixty area residents run .2 mile each carrying the Olympic flame.

**When:** Friday.

**Schedule:** 7:35 a.m. Swift Street and West Cliff Drive, proceeds to West Cliff Drive, past the Lighthouse, onto the Santa Cruz Wharf, to the Boardwalk, down Pacific Avenue.

8:40 a.m. Santa Cruz City Hall ceremony will feature many relay runners and a proclamation by Mayor Chris Krohn. Some streets will be closed around City Hall 8:55 a.m. Torch leaves City Hall. Torch bearer runs to Highway 17, where torch is picked up by a motorcade that will take it to the San Jose area.

**Contact:** For details, go to [www.santacruzparksandrec.com](http://www.santacruzparksandrec.com) or call 420-5273.