

Rutland News

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‘Light The Fire Within’ High school senior carries Olympic Torch

by Janetta Petkus

"While we were waiting for the large cauldron in the back of the truck, tons of people came up and just wanted to talk about it and look at it," says Kate Catlin, a former Rutland resident.

What everyone wanted to see was the flame that would inspire thousands of athletes and millions of onlookers at the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City.

The symbolic fire was recently brought from the site of the last games in Atlanta, Georgia to Clemson, South Carolina. There Catlin ignited her torch with light that originated in Greece, birthplace of the Olympic tradition, and then she ran two-tenths of a mile with it, arm held high.

"It's such a long journey to Salt Lake City that the flame goes across the country in relays, sometimes in convoys of Chevy cars with a Corvette in front," explains Catlin, one of the few honorees to actually carry the flame by hand. "It's always the same flame at every location but people use different torches.

"Two-tenths of a mile isn't much, but once you start running your arm gets surprisingly tired. I really enjoyed the experience. It was so much fun and I will definitely remember it forever."

Catlin was raised in Rutland, has a lot of cousins in the area, and now resides in Mebane, North Carolina. An active senior at Eastern Alamance High School, the soft spoken seventeen-year-old was nominated to be a torchbearer through the National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere. She chairs the National S.A.V.E. Youth Advisory Board and is a member of various school committees and clubs.

Treasured keepsakes

Once she was chosen for the Olympic Relay, packets of information arrived, as well as a white wind suit and white long-sleeved shirt that she will keep. She will also treasure her own torch, thanks to her aunt who bought the unique gift as a graduation present.

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Catlin describes her hand-held cauldron replica as "expensive and really beautiful. It's about three inches wide at the top and very narrow at the bottom, very shiny. The top of the torch is old, the bottom is new and the middle— where you hold it — symbolizes 'bridging the gap' between the two."

The outside of the torch is engraved with the words "Salt Lake 2002." On the bottom the relay theme, "Light The Fire Within," is inscribed.

An athlete herself, Catlin accompanied her team to the state basketball championship at Chapel Hill this year. "It was really neat. I kept thinking: Michael Jordan played on this court," she remembers with unabated wonder.

Although she is a Teacher Cadet, Catlin is unsure where her career path will take her. It may resemble the long and adventurous journey of the flame she helped to transport from Greece to America. But whether she becomes "a teacher, or a lawyer, a psychiatrist, or maybe a journalist," she already knows what matters most to her.

"It definitely has to be a people job," she says.