

Local man rolls from agony to victory

Alpine resident captures gold medal at Special Olympics

By Chris Butler
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Ruston resident Moses Woods Sr. moves around in a wheelchair and wears a gold medal around his neck at the Alpine Guest Center with a sense of self-respect that would command anybody's attention.

Six months ago, however, Woods had nothing that even resembled self-respect.

Six months ago Woods had nothing to believe in. Woods had no faith in life. He had no faith in people.

Woods lost his left leg in 2006 and his right leg in February, both to diabetes.

Woods, who just turned 60, despaired because of that, and because of his health problems, he said.

"I came back from near death," Woods said, comparing his life now to what it was earlier this year. "After the doctors cut my right leg off, I just stopped eating."

Someone took Woods to a rehabilitation center, where

“**S**he and everyone else here encouraged me to never give up.”

— *Moses Woods, gold medalist*

doctors used tubes to feed him through his stomach. At the time, Woods was thin and weighed 145 pounds.

"In that rehab center they had to put me in a cage, because they said I was cussing people and tearing stuff out of my body," Woods said.

Woods rebounded. He gained weight. He now weighs 180 pounds, he said.

Staff members at Alpine soon encouraged Woods to participate in a Special Olympics ceremony at the Pant-Ewing Coliseum on the University of

Louisiana at Monroe campus in Monroe.

Woods agreed to participate in a hands-only wheelchair race, where he would compete against six residents representing six other assisted living centers in north Louisiana. To win, Woods would have to roll his wheelchair from one end of the coliseum to the other, with more speed than his competitors.

Woods first had to train. His training included rigorous laps around Alpine on a daily basis, every day for two months, he said.

Alpine Activities Director Molly Story encouraged him more than anyone else, Woods said.

"She told me I was going to win. She knew I was going to win it. She and everyone else here encouraged me to never give up. It made me feel that the world cares — whether I do this or not. It gave me strength just to see those people believe in me," Woods said.

That encouragement continued at the race, he said.

"Miss Molly and her children were cheering me on. When I crossed the line I turned around and looked and there wasn't anyone there but me," Woods said.

Woods earned that gold medal and wears it not just for pride, but also to remind him of the most important lesson he's learned this year.

"This medal shows that I can accomplish anything that I go for as long as I try hard enough. People encouraged me so much that I felt I couldn't give up. I know that with God anything is possible," he said.

"Believe in yourself. Anything — anything — is possible. Once you give up hope (then) you die," Woods said.

In addition to taking pride in his gold medal, Woods also takes pride in something else. He's now engaged to a woman he's known for 13 years, he said.

Woods will never forget what inspired him to win that race.

"I wanted people to see me cross that line — and I did it," Woods said.



Leader photo by CHRIS BUTLER

Ruston resident Moses Woods shows off the gold medal he won at a recent Special Olympics ceremony.