Alaska Bikerun benefits SKI-HI
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Members of the 2014 Alaska Bikerun for SKI-HI.

For the 13th year in a row, Dr. Mike Tuccelli, now a retired deaf ASL instructor, led a group of 12 motorcyclists on his annual benefit ride for SKI-HI from Florida to Alaska and back. They took off from St. Augustine, Florida with seven riders on July 26, 2014 and picked up five more along the way from Georgia, Tennessee, New York, Iowa, Indiana and Minnesota and covered more than 10,000 miles! The riders raised $9,000 for the work of the SKI-HI Institute. Mike is now busy planning the 2015 ride. You can read about that ride and register to go on www.alaskabikerun.com. He plans to take a side trip to the Northwest Territories. Mike’s father, who died at age 98, rode his bike every day and used to say “It’s not the years left in your life but the life left in your years.”

Several things that happened in relationship to this event this summer are worth noting. The first was the sad news of the passing of Mike Tuccelli’s mother, Doris Stoliker, Sunday August 17 at the age of 95. She had joined Mike a few years ago for a portion of the Alaska ride in a sidecar. She loved to travel and had an adventurous spirit. Obviously, Mike inherited that. She had asked that donations be made in her name to SKI-HI for the work with young children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Two other riders were making the trip for special reasons. First was Jerry Greely of Florida, who dedicated this trip to two fellow riders who died of cancer this last year. Jerry and Andre Desbiens rode the motorcycles of both these individuals who passed, to Alaska and back. Jerry also dedicated the ride and gave a $1,000 donation to SKI-HI in honor of Amy, a young girl who was born deaf and who became an inspiration to his family over the years. This ride also helped Jerry accomplish two things on his bucket list, making it to the Arctic Circle with three other riders and then to Prudhoe Bay in 40 mph winds, 35 degrees, and a polar bear warning! Barry Hansel dedicated his ride to his father and a friend who is a paraplegic, both of whom had always wanted to make it to Alaska on their bikes.

The rider who raised the most money was David Foote of Maple Grove, Minnesota. He had been dreaming of making this trip to Alaska since he was a teenager and finally got the chance to do it this year after he retired. He raised almost $3,500 in pledges! He joined the group in Rosedale, Minnesota and his local motorcycle club provided a wonderful meal and evening for the Alaska riders. David also dedicated this ride to a great niece and nephew, Hunter and Riley, both born deaf this past year.

Another rider, John Williams, provided a barbeque dinner in his back yard for the whole group when they arrived in Burlington, Iowa, where he joined them for the rest of the trip. He also has family members with special needs. The other riders on this trip were Cindy and Lee Ebersold, Scott Kardenetz, Ken Klutz, Richard Moore, Dennis Owens, Andrew Sairrino, Thomas White and Robert Stevens. For many of these riders, this is one of those trips on their bucket list.

The SKI-HI Institute is located within the Division of Research and Evaluation, Center for Persons with Disabilities, College of Education at Utah State University in Logan. Starting in 1972 with a federal grant, SKI-HI developed one of the first early home intervention programs and curriculum for infants and toddlers who were deaf and hard of hearing in the country. Funding from this year’s ride will be going to some of the updates being written for this curriculum, one of which is a section on cochlear implants.

Over the years the Institute expanded with new model programs, materials and training in the areas of deafblindness, blind/visually impaired, deaf mentoring and other disabilities. Through grants, SKI-HI helped to start six new programs in the state of Utah that are now permanently funded by the legislature and operated by the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. Many of the SKI-HI Institute programs (e.g., SKI-HI, INSITE, VIISA) are implemented throughout the United States and Canada via trainings which are conducted by national and local trainers.

The Institute has also developed online courses in blindness and deafblindness in partnership with the
Hadley School for the Blind and through federal grants. These online courses are available through RCDE, the distance education programs of Utah State University. For more information about the SKI-HI Institute go to www.skihi.org.

We appreciate all that Tuccelli continues to do to help us move our work forward here at the SKI-HI Institute.

*This blog post was submitted by Elizabeth Dennison of SKI-HI.*