

Northland 300 marks 25 years on North Shore's snowy trails

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Snowmobiles have changed greatly in 25 years and so has the Northland 300. This pioneering snowmobile ride is marking 25 years of fun and fundraising Jan. 23-27. The organizers of this event are taking a look back at the past while preparing to continue raising funds for people with intellectual disabilities.



Since 1990, the Northland 300 has been a First Partner/ Sponsor of Special Olympics Minnesota. The Northland 300 is recognized and supported by its peers at Minnesota United Snowmobiling Association and the International Snowmobile Institute. The Northland 300 is also a member/participant in the Safe Snowmobiling Program. Special Olympics Minnesota provides year round sports training and competition for people with intellectual disabilities. This program contributes to lifelong physical fitness, personal growth and achievements and the Northland 300 is proud to be part of that.

The Northland 300 has come a long way since its inaugural ride in 1989. It began with 42 snowmobilers and support team members. Hundreds of snowmobile enthusiasts now participate. Over the years they have traveled more than 657,000 miles on trails of the North Shore.

The fundraiser has taken participants through Two Harbors, Lutsen, Eveleth, Ely and surrounding areas. Along the ride, meeting friends and supporting local businesses, it has been a great journey! The Northland 300 has raised more than \$3.6 million to help benefit the athletes of Special Olympics Minnesota and help increase Special Olympics participation from 3,500 to more than 7,100 individuals with intellectual disabilities. The Northland 300 is proud to continue making a difference in the lives of the athletes of Special Olympics Minnesota.

Dedication comes to mind when talking about Northland 300 snowmobilers. The riders and event workers go out in all kinds of weather. The Northland 300 is never cancelled and the dedication of

the volunteers and snowmobile enthusiasts will always find a way to make it happen.

In 1996, a story on KDLH TV announced “Northland 300—The Only Thing Moving on the North Shore during Record Breaking Weather.” That weekend, one of the year’s worst blizzards was headed toward the North Shore. Snow was falling and 18 inches of snow had fallen the night before the ride. Temperatures were -38 degrees with a wind chill factor of -65 degrees. That year 113 snowmobilers and support team members made their way to participate in the event even though roads were closed in other parts of the state and scores of events were cancelled.

Ingenuity has made life easier on the snowmobiler as well, with a lesser need of carrying extra spark plugs, spare gas, belts and windshields by the Northland 300 Support Team. Team members meet the riders at designated checkpoints along the route. From yesterday to today, snowmobiles have traveled a long way literally and figuratively.

The 25-year journey has never lacked creativity or determination. Throughout history Northland fundraising efforts have included “FIRST EVER” events such as Team Northland and Teen Northland (one-day snowmobile rides for snowmobile clubs and teenagers respectively) and “Outside of the Box” events including one-day motorcycle Road Rallies, golf tournaments, and 5K Fun Runs/Walks among other events.

Inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities has come full circle on the Northland 300. In 2009, Steven Eull became the first-ever Special Olympics Minnesota Athlete to participate on the Northland 300. He rode on the back of a sled driven by his coach, Jason Reinsch, sled completing the 300-plus miles of the journey. Eull raised the required amount of funds to participate and continues to be a Northland 300 participant today. For more information on this event, visit www.northland300.org or contact Kathy Karkula at 612-789-2081 or karkulak@hotmail.com or visit www.specialolympicsminnesota.org

Would you like to make history?

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota’s disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of physical and cognitive disabilities, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Past History Note articles can be found on www.accesspress.org Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities, www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com