

Ben and I recently had a discussion at a local pub, well we did until the management kicked us out they said something about wanting to start Happy Hour!! but, we did come to one conclusion, that this race could not exist without two critical things, infrastructure and volunteers. Just to let you know a secret about Ben, even in his hobbies, he shows a little bit about his obsession and attention to detail about infrastructure. Some guys like to build model ships and put

them in bottles, not Ben, his medium is snow globes!! Ben has twin sons Luke and Grant. This last Christmas for Luke, he built a scale model of downtown Hayward, you tip it up, and it snows. Only in his model, a little snow plow comes out to plow the streets!! Not to be out done, Grant got (you guessed it) a scale model of the Birkie Trail, tip it up, and it snows, only this time, a little piston bully comes out to groom the trail!! Oh, Paul and Mindy (you will especially like this), both the snowplow and

Piston Bully are powered by hydrogen³ fuel cells-no pollution-ONLY WATER!!

2018 was called the year of infrastructure. That is not to say that ABSF is done building, as there are still other big projects in the works.

2018 gave us the Samuel C Johnson family outdoor center, and we thank them for their long time support of the birkie. The year also gave us the "Key Log Rolling" bridge over double O, and we thank ^{The} Hoeschler family for funding it, it also gave us snow making at the start line. 2019 has been designated "as the year of the

4
volunteer” and I would like to thank
Birchleggers Jane Bidwell and Marcia
Engebretson for their incredibly
generous initial funding of the
“Tusentakk volunteer fund, once
again, Birchleggers leading the way in
starting the fund, to support our
critically important volunteers,
something I believe we can all agree is
long overdue. 2018 wasn’t the only
year of infrastructure, 76-78 and
2006-2008 come to mind, and I’ll
elaborate on them in a moment. The
Tony Wise Birkie Spirit award is
presented by our club to those who

3
have given outstanding contributions to the growth, and development of the American Birkebeiner, and the sport of cross country skiing. Some of us here, knew Tony, he was known for many attributes. Primarily, a promoter, he was a visionary, detail oriented, trend setter, eternally optimistic and enthusiastic. He called himself " a business adventurer", and said that "my basic philosophy of business is that I try to execute my dreams". I submit to you, that humility, also, was one of his attributes. Please allow me to explain how these attributes not

only apply to Tony but to this years ⁶ recipient of this award. Believe it or not, according to Tom Kelly, in his book Birkie Fever, Tony wasn't the one, who came up with the idea for the Birkie. Two people were instrumental, the first, was a Swede, Carl Hanson who loved reading Tony articles about the Swedish Vasaloppet, from Swedish newspapers. It was his influence, along with Sven Wiik (who happened to place second in the first Birkie) and designed trails at Telemark, and the Pre 76' Birkie Trail. They inspired Tony, to start having the Birkie, to promote

7
promote his new lodge, and this sport. Fortunately, Tony was humble and (excuse the pun), wise enough to take their suggestions. As the race progressed, and needed a bigger trail, to accommodate all of the skiers, Tony hired Marty Hall, (who is with us today), to design what is now the skate trail, between 76 and 78. Both Sven, who passed away a few years ago, and Marty Hall were paid for their hard work. Before we had a board of directors, In 2010, John Kotar, our Birchleggings club founder, Birkie founder and multi term ABSF Board

Member wisely chose to give both ⁸ Sven and Marty, this award, the only year that 2 people received it. Over time, what began as a classic ski race, became a skating race, as the sport evolved, and the number of classic skiers dwindled, to about 1 in 5. This posed both a problem, and an opportunity, for another one of our own; 31 year Birchlegger, David G Nelson. David, like Carl, going to Tony, went to today's recipient, who I want to refer to as Mr Mellow. David was volunteering to design and help build a separate classic trail, and Mr

Mellow, humbily and enthusiastically endorsed the idea, seeing the wisdom, and the need for it. Mr Mellow, fortunately, was in a position to both get permission from the counties, whose land the new trail would traverse, and, most importantly obtain the funds to do it. Interestingly enough, Mr Mellow's new proposal, was met with some opposition, oddly enough, from skiers, who, once the trail was functional, recanted, and apologized, saying how much they LOVED it. Fortunately, for all of us, David had 30 years experience as a

forester, intimately knew Topo maps, GPS, and had previous trail building experience, he also had a good friend, Jack Moin, a long time skier and trail groomer, who also volunteered to work with David, and Mr Mellow.

From the fall of 2006 -2008 the three of them, like the 3 muskateers, spent countless hours in the woods flagging and re-flagging the trail, getting it just right, about 9 km a year. Before the loggers could take out the trees and stumps, many volunteers, led by Mr Mellow, did the brush work to make a clear path, and then, after the

excavators bulldozed and graded, (11) numerous volunteers once again came back to rake, toss rocks and sticks, an estimated 300 hours of work. Mr Mellow had a day job, but fortunately, he, like David and Jack, had a real passion, and enthusiasm to build trails. Because of his respectful personality and passion he was able, over the 3 years gather many volunteers, among them, 2 of our board members, Connie Meek and Tom Rowley. Mr Mellow referred to Connie as a "platinum volunteer," that she rarely missed a trail building

opportunity. Thank you Connie and Tom. After the classic trail was done, because of their close relationship, Mr Mellow, along with David and Jack, gave us the Birkie Ridge trail. For his efforts, David received this award in 2012, and sadly passed away in 2014, still promoting, the extension of the classic trail, past double O. At his memorial service, in the fall of 2014, Mr Mellow gave the eulogy, for his great friend and fellow trail builder. Also, for his efforts in 2015, ABSF posted a plaque on the Birkie Ridge trail honoring David. For his trail building

13
efforts Jack Moin received this award last year. Even as late as last fall, Mr Mellow, was on social media, gathering volunteers, to work on the Easy Strider trail at double O.

We are Birchleggers, because of our love for this sport, this race, and these trails, and we finish what we started. His other 2 comrades have received this award for their incredible efforts and now it is time to recognize the 3rd of these trail builders. On behalf of the Birchleggings club board of directors is my great honor to present

the 2019 Tony Wise Birkie spirit award
to: Ned Zuelsdorff.