



Photo courtesy John Miles

WIDE, WIDE, WORLD— 2016 Alaska Cross Country Skiing Hall of Fame inductee John Miles has spent over 40 years sharing the sport of skiing with Bering Strait youth. He took many rural kids to compete at meets around the state and around the country. Joining Miles at the 1981 State Ski Meet in Fairbanks were, front row, left to right, Paul Lincoln, Lillian Aukongak, Darlene Dewey and Marci Ongtowasruk. In the back row, from left to right were, Miles, Toni Kimoktoak, Boyd Saccheus, Roy Agloinga, Marcus Sorie, Isaac Okleasik, Dwayne Charles, Charlie Brown and Victor Nylin.

John Miles enters Alaska Cross Country Ski Hall of Fame

By Keith Conger

The audience at Saturday night's Alaska Cross Country Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Anchorage read like a Who's Who of Alaska skiing. Past and present Olympians and US National team members, junior national and citizen racers, sport organizers and enthusiasts, and family and friends gathered together at the 49th State Brewing Company to honor the newest inductees.

Included in the class of 2016 was John Miles, a man who has made an enduring mark on the lives of people from the Seward Peninsula. Cross Country Alaska paid tribute to Miles for the amazing contributions he has made over a 40-year span.

Miles is Western Alaska's "Johnny Appleseed" of skiing. With a gregarious smile, an infectious enthusiasm and a trademark bushy mustache, he has helped bring the joy of cross country skiing to thousands of young rural athletes and is one of the most beloved figures in the Bering Strait region.

Miles grew up on skis in New Hampshire. Before coming to the Seward Peninsula in 1975, he lived for several months on the Kobuk River. There, he learned about a job opening that led to him becoming the principal/teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Council.

Rose Titus was one of the people living there at that time. Council had only a few families and about 10 students. She states that Miles is much more than a ski coach. "He is our friend," she says warmly.

Titus, who is known by generations of skiers around the region as the ski meet cook in White Mountain, said, "He saw the Alaska magazine and there was a picture of the Covenant Church here in White Mountain. So when he saw that, he said, 'I want to be there.' So he came down from Kobuk."

The next year many residents of Council left to seek employment elsewhere, so Miles went to teach in nearby Koyuk, where he built, and lived in, a sod house. With encouragement from fellow Koyuk educators Don and Lynn Gillespie he began cultivating a ski program.

Miles gladly accepted the role of Bering Strait School District sports coordinator when it was presented. He promoted and organized many activities, and convinced the district to purchase ski equipment and pay teachers to be ski coaches.

"John, all by himself, traveled throughout the (Bering Strait School) District, sleeping on floors and in sheds, scraping together supplies and funding so that he could put students as young as three years old and up, and their teachers, on skis," said Kim Sweeney a former classroom and ski teacher in White Mountain. "Beyond skiing, John was, and remains, a friend to every age villager in the Bering Strait region."

Sweeney notes that Miles always prefers to use local homes as a base rather than a village's school so that

he can be closer to the people. "Moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, all know John is interested in them as individuals and enjoys a profound respect for, and knowledge about, their culture," she says.

As a result of those actions, nearly every student in the district had skis. The halls of most schools were lined with ski racks. "We were putting them on skis when they were three, four and five-years-old," says Miles. "All you do is go skiing with them, and they copy you."

The annual week-long trip by John Miles was one of the most highly anticipated events of the year in each isolated village. A visit from Miles, says Sweeney, "was as close to Santa Claus himself walking in the door as life would get for a young skier."

For professional development, Miles went to a seminar for coaches in Anchorage. One of the instructors was 2015 Alaska Hall of Fame inductee, and former Olympic biathlete, Jim Mahaffey. As their friendship grew in the late 70s, Mahaffey followed Miles out to western Alaska where they created many rural venues. The pair travelled as far north as the NANA region giving clinics.

Miles tapped into local native hunting cultures and lured many kids to skiing by establishing a biathlon race program and by conducting marksmanship competitions. Getting a participatory ribbon in the hands of each young entrant was always his highest priority.

In 1978 Miles set up a weekend of racing in Koyuk. Over time, this grew into an event called the Koyuk Invitational and will be celebrated for the 39th time this spring. The following year White Mountain hosted a regional meet for junior high and high school athletes. This is now known as the BSSD Ski and Biathlon Championships. With few exceptions, the modern day biathlon competition at either one of these two events is the largest attended biathlon race in Alaska each year.

Miles's race influence extended well beyond the Seward Peninsula. He was instrumental in helping White Mountain's Paul Lincoln and Jim Oksoktaruk and Golovin's Helen (Amaktoolik) Spindler perform at the highest junior national levels in the 1980s and '90s. During that time Miles began work with Arctic Winter Games biathlon. Former Olympic Aelin Peterson got her first pair of skis from him when she was a young girl in Unalakleet.

Miles says a successful skier development formula was established in White Mountain. Sweeney taught the elementary students there, and would energetically get the kids out on skis three or four times a week. When they got older, she would hand them over to her husband Eric Morris.

"He had a coaching mentality like nobody else," said Miles of Morris. "He was able to train those kids, in

White Mountain conditions, so they had the confidence to beat anybody, anywhere."

Morris, in turn, would pass his protégés on to Miles, who took them to races around the country. "At one point Jim Oksoktaruk beat all the kids in Anchorage and all the kids in the United States," says Miles. "And Paul was in the top five and Helen was in the top five. Those kids were pretty awesome."

Miles was introduced at the Hall of Fame ceremony by Lincoln and Spindler. "It's still hard for me to imagine, the ski program that he started produced an Olympic athlete from our region and three junior national champions," said Lincoln. "He inspired so many kids, so many people in the region."

In recent years Lincoln has taken over some of the duties of outfitting BSSD schools with skis after Miles retired. "I went up that first year with him, and I was amazed that every place we went, everybody knew John," he said. "Not just the little kids, but the older people."

"I grew up in one of the many villages that John sprinkled his ski magic upon," said Spindler. "I had never seen skis before John arrived in Golovin. There he was, a man with long hair in the village, mustache, and a beard about four inches long. He had hands that were callused, yet he treated every student like a fragile piece of glass."

"Those skis became tools for me, tools that molded much of who I am today," said Spindler who went on to become a first grade teacher. "John helped instill the love of skiing, and so much more for me - to set goals, to work hard, to be kind, and to encourage others along the way."

Miles realized that getting large groups of kids to travel from rural villages to the road system for the Alaska state meet was impractical and expensive, so in 1986 he helped



Photo by Keith Conger

INDUCTEE— John Miles, right, was inducted into the Alaska Cross Country Skiing Hall of Fame on Saturday in Anchorage. Introducing Miles were two of his former ski champions: Paul Lincoln, formerly of White Mountain, and Helen (Amaktoolik) Spindler, formerly of Golovin.

coaches from western Alaska collaborate with ones from the interior to form the Western Interior Ski Association.

WISA has offered an annual three-day race event for Alaska's non-road system skiers since 1987. Miles helped WISA join forces with Team Alaska so rural athletes could qualify for the Arctic Winter Games through a WISA meet. His efforts helped pave the way for young skiers and biathletes from villages as remote as Savoonga to compete internationally in places like Canada and Greenland.

"We are a ski family. We come from a remote part of Alaska, but we enjoy skiing just like the people in Anchorage do," said Miles as he ad-

ressed the induction audience. "Skiing is just a tool to bring us all together."

Being recognized with Miles were Jim Galanes, and Tay and Lowell Thomas Jr., who helped establish a nordic training facility on Eagle Glacier. Four-time Olympian Nina Kempel was also honored.

John Miles retired from ski coaching in 2010. He currently helps maintain trails in Homer. Sweeney and Morris, who are enjoying their retirement as Miles' neighbors, often wake up to meticulously-groomed trails in the winter. "This is the labor of one who not only knows what perfect trails look and feel like, but actively works to share that love with others," says Sweeney.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Got Respect?

- Everyone has the right to feel safe and respected
- Everyone has the right to live free from violence and abuse

Please join the community
in a Walk against Violence!

1:30 p.m. Tuesday, October 11, 2016

We will meet at the **State Building parking lot** and walk west on Front Street and north on Bering Avenue to Anvil City Park.

Ad brought to you by loveisrespect.org and the **Bering Sea Women's Group**



Nome Public Schools Annual Child Find Notice 2016-17

All children have the ability to learn. Each one has unique strengths and challenges. Some learn faster. Some have different needs due to problems with seeing, hearing, talking, moving, or simply dealing with people. This notice is to inform you and the community about the right to, and availability of, educational services for all children with disabilities.

Nome Public School District is required by federal and state law (34 CFR 300.220-34 CFR 300.121) to conduct an annual 'Child Find' effort as a means to locate, identify, and evaluate every student between the ages of 3 and 21 with a suspected disability within its jurisdiction.

Disabilities that qualify for Special Education services include: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, early childhood developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, specific learning disability, cognitive impairment, orthopedic impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, or any combination of these, which has or might be expected to interfere with a child's educational performance. Not all children referred for assessment qualify for special education services.

Children who are found eligible are entitled to a free and appropriate education, including specially designed instruction tailored to meet his or her unique needs. Any information regarding a child is treated in a confidential manner as required by state and federal law.

If you suspect that your child or a child you know may need to be identified in any of the areas listed, and the child is **not** currently receiving Special Education services, please contact:

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