

Yorkton Stories

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Snowarama started as a bumpy ride in a highway ditch

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Dick DeRyk

It started on a modest scale in 1977 after local snowmobile enthusiasts were encouraged by a well-known professional wrestler of the day to get involved in raising money for what was then known as the Saskatchewan Council for Crippled Children and Adults, which later became the Saskatchewan Abilities Council, now known as SaskAbilities. Then and now it was active in Yorkton, operating programs including the Lions School on Independent Street, which opened in 1960, and a so-called sheltered workshop, which opened in 1966.

In the spring of 1976, the wrestler "Whipper" Billy Watson visited Yorkton to talk to the local snowmobile club about a project he had started to promote in Ontario with great success, Timmy's Snowarama. The intent was to raise money to assist those with physical and mental handicaps. Among those hearing his appeal were Barry Bradshaw and Art Belous. Barry was an owner of the Sports Land snowmobile and motorbike store on Road, and Art and his brother Rick owned the Shell bulk fuel dealership. Watson had also visited other cities in Saskatchewan, and both Regina and Saskatoon started their own Snowaramas in 1976. Yorkton picked up on the idea and organized the first one in 1977.

The Regina and Saskatoon events ran out of steam, or maybe snow, in the 1990s. But Yorkton is still going strong. On Saturday, March 7, 2026, the 49th Snowarama will be held here. As you will hear, it has grown in both scope and success. The first one raised about \$10,000. In 2025, the total came close to \$300,000. The first one was a ride in the ditches of Highway 10 east to Roblin and back. For the past couple of years, it's not only been snowmobile rides on groomed trails, but a ride on motorcycles, cars and trucks in Arizona, organized by former snowmobilers who now spent their winters in the sun. They are the Desert Chapter. And Bowlarama in Yorkton, because not everyone can or wants to ride snowmobiles, but everybody can bowl.

We follow the story of Yorkton Snowarama from the start to the present by talking to those who have been involved:

Barry Bradshaw, now 83 years of age and involved from the very first one, who is now joined as co-chair by his son Rick.

Alvin Law, who was the first Timmy at Snowaramas in Saskatoon and Yorkton.

Deana Stroshein of SaskAbilities in Yorkton, who has taken over much of the administrative and organizational work from volunteers.

Kenn Propp, who has been the top fundraiser of the event for many years, and whose company, Harvest Meats, continues to be a major supporter.

Barry's other son, Dean, who still has a trophy recognizing him as the youngest boy writer in the first Snowarama when he was 13 years of age, and who is about to retire from a career in sales the summer.

Larry Hillworth, who, along with Rick Bilous started the Desert Chapter.

And Tamara Holowatuik, now Kerluke, who grew up in Yorkton and first rode the trails with her dad Jerry and attended the dinner when she was eight years old. She now lives and works in Saskatoon, but marks Snowarama on her calendar so she can come back and participate every year.

We'll start at the beginning and talk with Barry Bradshaw about snowmobiling in Yorkton and how Snowarama came about. Snowmobiling, he says, has a special attraction for him.

Barry Bradshaw

To me, it's getting out into the outdoors. And I just love seeing animals and stuff. You're always, deer out there, and you're on the trail, and there's a moose comes across, or a herd of elk out by one of our shelters. There's a herd of a hundred elk there just about every year. They also take all our signs down, of course, when they go through. So we're there putting signs back up. Just enjoying it, you know, just getting out there in the fresh air. It is a little exercise. It's not a whole bunch, but it is some. The new machines ride pretty nice.

Dick DeRyk

When did you start snowmobiling?

Barry Bradshaw

That would be back in the '60s sometime. Yeah. When we had our delivery business, we used to deliver for Eaton's. And they sold Viking, which, just forget who made it, might have been Polaris or one of those companies. And they had one in there as a demo. So we took it out in the field, actually, where John Deere used to be, where Claas is now, in that field to the south. And that was a big ride, a whole half a mile. I mean I looked back, my partner and myself said, boy, this is great. It was just a little single cylinder, you know. That's where we I started, I guess, and then riding, start riding, and got into business in '74. Arctic Cat and Moto-Ski, which is of course bought out by Bombardier later, then Yamaha in '78 until '88 is when I sold out.

Dick DeRyk

You haven't stopped riding.

Barry Bradshaw

No, no, I've been on S.Sask Snowmobile, I was president for quite a few years, and I was on the board. I just got off the board this past June because it's time for someone younger to get in there. And there was somebody that wanted to run, and I met him, and he seemed like a pretty good fella, so I said I'm gonna step down. But I'm still with our local club, I look after our trail all around

Good Spirit with three or four other fellows. We've got about 380 kilometers all the way from Yorkton to Foam Lake.

Dick DeRyk

And what's involved in setting the trails?

Barry Bradshaw

Well, you need, obviously snow. Snow. You need snow. You have to sign it, and there's regulations, you know, we have to follow a signing, especially nowadays for liability reasons. This year, being we got that big dump of snow, it was very difficult to go out and pull a sleigh and put signs up because it was just too much snow to pull the sleigh through. So we did do some grooming ahead of time, but you got to sign right behind it basically. You can't leave a trail groomed and not sign. Grooming is pretty time consuming. You know, you're going about the speed of a tractor out in the field, seven, eight miles an hour. And we've got we've got about two hundred kilometers that we look after at Good Spirit. The fellows out of Yorkton look after pretty well up to Good Spirit, not quite. But then we groom for Springside too. We have three groomers, and there's one groomer that stays at Foam Lake, we have one at Good Spirit, and then one at Yorkton.

Dick DeRyk

What motivated you to get involved to start Snowarama?

Barry Bradshaw

That was in '76. We were called the Yorkton Snowmobile Club then. And we had a contact from down east, and they talked about this fundraiser for the crippled children and adults in those days, and they always had a Timmy, which they don't do anymore. So in the fall of '76, I don't know if you remember Whipper Billy Watson, the younger people, who the hell are you talking about? He was a spokesperson for them or a promoter for them, and he was touring around getting these rides set up, raising money for crippled children and adults. And he came, we had a meeting with him at the Holiday Inn in the fall of '76, and he was a pretty good promoter. He got us hyped up for doing one the following, I think we did it the first part of March. That's how it really started, Whipper Billy Watson, he promoted it, and first Timmy was Alvin Law. We had a committee set up, of course I got on, I had the dealership then.

Art Bilous and myself, we were involved in making the trail. We had no groomed trails in those days. No groomer, nothing, it was just cross-country. So we decided, and I can't remember why, we decided to ride to Roblin and back, which is fifty miles one way. In the ditch on one side going, and on the ditch on the other side coming back. Roblin, there was a gourmet chicken place. They supplied the lunch, and there was a couple of fuel stops along the way. There was fuel in Wroxton in those days, and then Roblin. That was it. We went there and back. I think we left around eight o'clock or so, between eight and nine. We're back at four o'clock in those old days in 77 and riding in the ungroom trails in the ditch. It's amazing, you know, when you think about it.

Dick DeRyk

You went down through the valley.

Barry Bradshaw

Yeah, the valley. Actually there was a ski hill there one time on the far side. We went up the ski hill on the one side and cut back to the ditch. That's kind of how it started, just getting a bunch of club members all hyped up, and he did that and we've been going ever since.

Dick DeRyk

And it was a fundraiser. How much money did you raise?

Barry Bradshaw

Just under \$10,000. There were 61 or two riders. It was pretty good, actually, in those days.

Dick DeRyk

Among the volunteer helpers for that first Snowarama were two Yorkton CB clubs. I told Barry I'm going to have to explain what those are for the benefit of younger generations who know mostly cell phones. Well, CB or citizen band radios were, if you will, prehistoric cell phones. A way for two radios to communicate while some distance apart, often used by truckers in those days to talk to each other. Signing off with 10-4, good buddy. The CB clubs helped out.

Barry Bradshaw

Yeah, we had two CB clubs in those days, because of course, no cell phones. So CB clubs were a big thing, and it just kind of got going a couple years before that. And they really, really helped out with along the highway and stuff with traffic control and all that. We had seven checkpoints where riders had to check in to make sure that they're going where they're supposed to and everything's okay. CB clubs were big in those days, and they really helped things out, keeping track of everybody. Rick then, he wasn't old enough to ride, he was only ten, I think. So he rode with one of the fellas, the CB guys, helped keep track of stuff.

Dick DeRyk

Well, you'd be keeping track to make sure the rider didn't get lost between checkpoints, right?

Barry Bradshaw

We didn't have any arrows or anything like we have now on the trail, but I think we used some flags here and there and sticks and stuff for keep people going. And then there's lots of approaches to cross and stuff, and I think we just did it.

Dick DeRyk

The event still attracts longtime riders, as well as kids.

Barry Bradshaw

There's still lots of people that have ridden for 40 years, we get guys like Jerry Holowatuik, Yorkton Welding, Jason Popowich, Kenn Propp, he raises the most every year. He does a lot for sponsoring stuff, food and stuff for the lunch and everything. Our club does a great job.

Dick DeRyk

Who's the youngest? Is there an age limit?

Barry Bradshaw

You have to be a certain age before you can ride, you have to be twelve. You have to be with a parent or a guardian. Some of them ride with their dad, younger, like six or seven years old. And there's a prize for that. The one that got the most pledges. We're trying to get some younger people in there.

Dick DeRyk

Your son Dean was one of the first younger, he got the trophy, I believe, for the youngest rider that year.

Barry Bradshaw

Because he had the most funds. There was some other younger riders too, but they didn't have quite amount of money he had.

Dick DeRyk

And you, you're gonna keep on going?

Barry Bradshaw

Yeah, oh yeah. I just keeps me active, and I think I get a little exercise from it, you know, and always doing something and signing trails and you're tramping around the snow and you know, getting some fresh air and running a groomer, which I enjoy. And got some good fellows out there that help out.

Dick DeRyk

The first event was followed by a dinner, which still continues. But that first one was a bit different than those later on.

Barry Bradshaw

The first one when we rode in '77, we had the banquet in that and a dance in Springside in the hall there. And everybody had to dress up in a suit. Oh, yeah, dress and all that, all dressed up. It isn't like that anymore. No. But it was pretty entertaining. I guess being younger at the time, and there wasn't any real older people snowmobiling then either, they didn't ride in it, they were mostly younger people. Now we have a lot of older people. The MC was Father Don Lukey. It went over good, and we had dance after. A band played. We had spot dances with prizes and all that kind of stuff. And we probably went till one or two in the morning. Now it's pretty quiet as far as the banquet because we don't have a dance anymore. But next year we might do something for a 50th, in a little bigger way.

Dick DeRyk

And obviously it caught on, because you've been doing it every since.

Barry Bradshaw

Yeah, the Ability Centre, with people like Deana and the staff there are just terrific. When we started, the committee did most of the work, but now really it's basically from the Ability Centre with Deana and the group there that do all that. We still look after the trails. Our snowmobile club, the Yorkton Snow-Riders, they're a great supporter too. They groom the trails and all that. It probably cost them a couple of thousand dollars a year just to look after everything.

Saskatoon got set up the year before us, I think it was. They kept going for quite a few years, and then their expenses got higher. They're only allowed so much. And Moose Jaw. But we're the only ones in Saskatchewan. They still have a few down east.

Now there's a Desert Chapter. Fellas that go down south to Phoenix area. Well, Larry Hilworth was really involved and Kathy and Rick Bilous and the Flamans. I don't know who just came up with the idea, but they thought about this bike ride down there, motorcycle ride. Last year they they raised over \$100,000 just down there. And they do a little ride and they stop and have lunch somewhere. We hook up with TV and stuff.

Dick DeRyk

They moved their winter down south, and not a whole lot of snow in Arizona?

Barry Bradshaw

Well, no. And they wanted to keep supporting it. A hell of an idea.

Dick DeRyk

Much more about the Desert Chapter a little later when we talk to Larry Hilworth.

Barry's two sons, Dean and Rick, have both been involved from the start. Rick, who followed his dad into the snowmobile and motorcycle business, first worked with owner Rick Schrader, and since 2008 has been the majority owner of Schrader Honda Yamaha Suzuki on Highway 9 north of the city. A couple of years ago, Rick joined Barry as co-chairs of Snowarama. Dean, who is about to retire in Kelowna from a long sales career, rode in the first one at the age of 13 and was the youngest boy rider that year. He remembers.

Dean Bradshaw

I remember it being cold. Because I remember the hot chocolate stop when we got to the valley. I remember Alvin Law participating. That was that was not a big deal because he was kind of on the cusp of you know being a local celebrity back then. I was probably three or four years younger than him, but we had gone to the Regional (high school) to see him play drums, I think, by that point already. I think he maybe he had already started telethons at that point, so I remember that vividly. The youngest rider participation trophy was honestly, I remember us kind of all joking about it at the time because you know, we had been following dad around on snowmobiles at that point for probably three, four or five years already. Rick was a couple years younger. I turned 13 that January, so 13 must have been the the cutoff or the limit to to ride alone. If Rick would have been allowed, he would have been the youngest rider for sure.

Dick DeRyk

Do you remember how much you raised?

Dean Bradshaw

I seem to remember about \$200, but that was probably, maybe it was a little more. Maybe it was \$250. That was, you know, back then kind of a novel thing, and the grandparents were still around to kind of support the young kids.

Dick DeRyk

You hit up the family, did you?

Dean Bradshaw

That's right. And friends at school, I guess, too.

Dick DeRyk

You still have the trophy?

Dean Bradshaw

I do still have the trophy. I dug it out, it's quite a participation trophy. All it says on it is youngest boy a rider, sponsored by Englow Farm Service, doesn't have the year on it or anything.

Back in the day, these sleds were, you know, they were they were not what they are today. They were pretty rough rides and they didn't have a lot of protection, and the gear wasn't as good either back then. I mean, you were you were in the elements and you didn't have hand warmers and all the fun stuff they have now. We take it for granted now, but there were no groomed trails back then. It was, yeah, you were in an ungroomed ditch with all the culverts and everything else to get around. You know, a hundred miles doesn't maybe seem like that much. And it was mild. I don't think all the sleds made it. You pledged by the mile, if you turned around halfway. You only got half the pledge.

Dick DeRyk

You're still ride now?

Dean Bradshaw

Vancouver for ten years. Not really a snowmobile town. Moved to the Okanagan in the mid-nineties. Dad would come out, we'd get out in the mountains. It's a whole different animal out here. I get back once a winter, twice a winter, and get out for a ride. And it's still Rick and I following dad around, basically, after all these years. And I was actually thinking about it last winter when I was out, how lucky that we actually are to still be out there doing this, the three of us. And now with Rick's daughter's following us around, third generation. So it's it's quite something. It just gives me a warm fuzzy when I do get out there these days.

Dick DeRyk

Also at that first Snowarama was Alvin Law, who was born without arms due to his natural mother having been treated with thalidomide, a drug used in the late 1950s and early '60s to treat morning sickness in pregnant women. By the time its horrendous effects were discovered, it was estimated between 10,000 and 20,000 newborns around the world were affected, of which about half did not survive.

Alvin did survive, was given up by his birth family when he was just five days old. He was adopted by Jack and Hilda Law of Yorkton, empty nesters in their 50s, who raised him to be independent. He learned to do what other kids did, although without arms. He played trombone and drums in the Yorkton Regional High School band, had a brief career as a disc jockey on Regina radio, and did community relations work in Alberta during International Year of the Disabled Person in 1981, followed by four years doing community relations work for the Saskatchewan Council. All that

morphed into a long career as a motivational speaker, something he still does. As he writes on his website, alvinlaw.com, his public speaking career started when he was just three years old. In those days, he writes, "Strangers would repeatedly walk up to my mum, point at me, and then bluntly ask, 'What happened to the little boy?' Mum's typical reply was, 'Ask him. He's not stupid.'

One of the recipients of the funds raised by Snowarama is Camp Easter Seal, a camp for youth and adults experiencing disability. It was founded in 1954 and for the first two years operated at two locations, Manitou Beach near Watrous, and at Crystal Lake north of Canora. In 1956, it moved permanently to the shores of Little Manitou Beach and marks its 75th anniversary there this year. In 1976, Alvin was Timmy, the name at the time for the ambassador for Camp Easter Seal. He was front and centre at the start of the first Snowarama in Saskatoon that year, and the next year came home to Yorkton for the first Snowarama here.

What are your recollections of that first Snowarama?

Alvin Law

The recollection has to be connected to the other part of the story, that I never planned to be a Timmy. That happened because I was found out at Camp Easter Seal by a CBC news crew while I was shooting bows and arrows on a target while I was there for my week of, I called it the penal colony. I didn't want to go to Camp Easter Seal because I wasn't handicapped. Mom and Dad, you're trying to get rid of me, you're sending me to prison. We really, that exactly how I felt until I learned that that wasn't what it was like at all, it was a glorious place. So that experience at Camp Easter Seal was a profound one in me understanding why Easter Seals was so important as a charity.

When I was asked to be the Timmy, I had a recollection, and this is going back way, way, way long. I remember meeting a great wrestler by the name of Whipper Billy Watson while I was an inmate at the Ontario Crippled Children's Center back in the 60s. And there was an Easter Sales Timmy from Ontario. And we were all about six, seven years old. And this little Timmy got all the attention from Whipper Billy Watson because he was a Timmy. And I was so jealous when we went out on this day trip, right? That I was wishing I could be someday a Timmy. Well, that never happened until surprisingly when I was 16, and a guy named Gord Tanner from the Council for Crippled Children and Adults asked me if I'd like to be one. And I had no clue what that was going to mean. But as I remember vividly, it was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. Not only going to events that sponsored Easter Seals and, you know, being recognized as the Timmy and saying a few words, as they always wanted you to do.

But then this thing called Snowarama happened, the first one was in Saskatoon. I was in Saskatoon before I was in Yorkton. And I had no idea what this was. But I will tell you, it was a mind-blowing experience for a yet-to-be 17-year-old to see so many people that were committed to this idea. But the biggest thing that I remember about Snowarama in 1977, I got to ride a snowmobile with George Reed in Saskatoon, from Saskatoon to Warman or whatever that town is, south of Saskatoon. And we were only supposed to go a block. We were supposed to go through the red tape. The media was supposed to take the video and the pictures, and we were just supposed to stop. And George Reed stopped and said, You okay? I said, I'm fine. Where are you going? He goes, Oh, I'm driving all the way. And I said, Can I come with you? I can't believe George Reed said, sure. So imagine with his arms around me, I'm in front of him, he's bracing me. We

drove a snowmobile for 45 kilometers through the ditches of the highways along that road towards the middle ground where they stopped for lunch. And George Reed was one of the classiest human beings I've ever met in my life. Then remember that there was more than one. There was Saskatoon, then there was Yorkton, then there was Regina. What an incredible charity that I got to be part of and still value in my heart forever.

Dick DeRyk

Did you ride the route in Yorkton?

Alvin Law

I rode through the tape again, as we did before. I think there got to be a memo sent out going, don't let Alvin go the whole way. Well, because that was hard. Can you imagine trying to keep me on a snowmobile in front of you? It was mostly just ceremony. And of course, proud, proud to be from Yorkton. So impressed was how many people were dedicated to this cause. They didn't ask any questions, you know, what are we doing? It was like, okay, Barry Bradshaw. You know, you don't say no to Barry Bradshaw, first of all. Even to this day, you know, I would suggest to you that we need more of that because we're being led down this pathway that says, oh, people don't care about each other anymore. Yes, they do. They care immensely for each other. And that's why celebrating this whole thing is a very important reminder of how big a difference it made, not only for a charity, but in bringing people out to say, what a great group of folks. What an incredible, incredible community Yorkton is.

Dick DeRyk

Alvin remembers Camp Easter Seal, a beneficiary of the funds raised. Did you go back to Camp Easter Seal after your experience as a Timmy? As you said, before it was kind of like prison. Did you change your mind about that at some point?

Alvin Law

After graduating from broadcasting school in Calgary, I ended up with a job as a disc jockey in Regina that was short-lived because in 1981 it was declared the International Year of Disabled Persons. And a young man that I used to do telethons with named Lee Bussard, who had cerebral palsy, drafted me into Alberta. I lived in Wetaskiwin of all places, to go out and be an ambassador for the International Year of Disabled Persons, speaking in schools all across Alberta. Contract with him ended that June. I didn't know what I was going to do for the summer.

Ended up going to Saskatoon that May of 1981. I had a lunch with Gord Tanner, who was the original guy that picked me as Timmy, told him I wasn't going to be sure what I was doing in the fall. He said, How about I hire you? I said, As what? He goes, I don't know, I'll figure it out. I ended up getting a job as a community relations director. So my job was to go out around Saskatchewan and do speeches in schools and also in communities, often in the evening, to promote Easter Seals, but also I was responsible for not all of the funds raised, but directing a lot of the fundraising efforts directly at Camp Easter Seal, which meant I visited Camp Easter Seal on a regular basis for four years in a row. And it was not lost on me how that job was so incredibly important. It was also not lost on me how incredibly important Camp Easter Seal was. It changed lives.

Dick DeRyk

Deana Stroshein is the community relations coordinator for SaskAbilities in Yorkton. When did you get involved, or when did Yorkton SaskAbilities get more involved in helping with the organizational work?

Deana Stroshein

SaskAbilities has always been part of it just because we were the recipient of those dollars raised, of course. But as the years went on and things changed, and I think rules and stuff changed, then SaskAbilities got more involved. When I started, 2010 was my first Snowarama, and I was hired as the first permanent full-time community relations coordinator. Before me, they would hire contract staff to help out with planning and coordinating the fundraising event. But because of continued growth and continued growth of SaskAbilities, it turned into a permanent full-time position. So here I still am, just over 16 years later. But I've met some really great people. And, you know, as the event has continued to grow and many different pieces have been added to it, the wing nights and stuff like that. So it's made it bigger and great. But we still, those volunteers are so key. They spend countless hours out there grooming and marking trails, making sure the trails are up to par is what they need to be, collecting prizes, promoting the event, inviting their friends to ride, you know, collecting pledges. So it's really like thousands of people come together every year to make Snowarama happen, including the donors.

Dick DeRyk

Do you ride?

Deana Stroshein

I do not ride in Snowarama.

Dick DeRyk

Too busy getting everything sorted out organization-wise.

Deana Stroshein

And that's a good, you know, that's a good thing. If if there wasn't much to do during the day, that means there wouldn't be many riders out. But after almost 200 people register for Snowarama, I'm really grateful that there's a lot of dollars to sort through and get the deposits ready and figure out who our top pledge raisers are and who our prize winners are, and get ready to celebrate everybody's hard work at the awards banquets.

Dick DeRyk

In recent years, the money raised supports three programs provided by SaskAbilities, still including Camp Easter Seal.

Deana Stroshein

Which is the only completely accessible summer resort in all of Saskatchewan for individuals experiencing disability. So it really is a remarkable place. Absolutely every aspect from the dining hall to the walkways to the dock to get on the pontoon boat, to the amphitheater and the treehouse, to the yurt that's a new addition and is completely accessible. So everybody can fully participate in all aspects of Camp Easter Seal.

And then we have the Summer Fun program, and it's an urban day camp that operates in four cities here in Saskatchewan, here in Yorkton, as well as Swift Current, Regina, and Saskatoon. And it operates during the months of July and August, and children and youth experiencing disability come out for a great day with their friends and peers, and they do everything from games and crafts to tours in the community and outside of the community. They've been out to you know provincial parks and lakes that are in our surrounding area, as well as to the fire hall. And that's a really big highlight for a lot of kids that we see throughout the summer.

And then the last one is called Adaptive Technology Services, and that is a provincial program that uses technology to minimize the impact of having a disability. So it might use anything from a keyboard to an iPad to be able to provide communication for somebody who maybe doesn't use your traditional way to communicate. I've seen people who have had specific keyboards made so they can still continue to type and work full-time after an accident where they lost the mobility of their hands and fingers. So it's a really life-changing experience as well as a program that provides independence by the use of technology.

Dick DeRyk

Now, when it started, it raised about 10 grand. Last year it raised \$294,000. That's quite a, even over 50 years, that's quite a growth when I look at the numbers, even back 10, 15 years ago. You were about 140, 150. So it continues to grow.

Deana Stroshein

It's pretty remarkable to stop and think about it when you actually talk about those stats to wrap your head around the support that's still coming. It's it's overwhelming to hear those numbers and to hear it recap. But yeah, it's a big part of the number of riders has stayed pretty similar. But the folks and the amount of dollars they raise and the community sponsorship that's come in that continues to increase. Of course, the Desert Chapter, that's a couple key Snowarama riders that used to ride every year and have since turned into snowbirds and rallied up a great group there, and they continue to raise phenomenal dollars for this cause. And another cool addition that we've made to Snowarama, this will be the fourth annual, it's called Bowlarama. So some parents of children, youth, and adults experiencing disability wanted to get involved and wanted to also show ways that they could support camp because it's such an important piece of their family and their life. Bowling is an accessible activity that everybody can participate in. So we started Bowlarama for Snowarama, and its first year it raised, you know, \$8,000, \$9,000. And last year it raised just about \$25,000. So those additions have all tallied up to make Snow Rama's grand totals the last couple of years, you know, growing and really incredible.

Dick DeRyk

You've had good support from businesses in Yorkton, and some of those have been around for a long time.

Deana Stroshein

The local media here has been remarkable right from the start or close to it, you know, the newspapers, our local TV stations, and regardless of who has owned or managed or worked those businesses, they've still continued to be supportive, and that support has grown too. And we've had new media outlets that are added to Yorkton area, the Rock, and they've all come on with nothing but great support to be a part of the event. So we're very, very grateful.

Dick DeRyk

At one time there were more Snowaramas in Saskatchewan than there are now.

Deana Stroshein

So we just have Yorkton left. Saskatoon and Regina both used to have Snowaramas as well. And I believe they started a year or two before Yorkton's, which the first one was 1977. And the Saskatoon and Regina ones wrapped up in the mid to late '90s.

I think it's a several pieces that are why Yorkton. I think a big part is our Snowarama committee, which is an incredibly dedicated group of volunteers. As you know, Barry Bradshaw has been on the committee since before it was a committee, but it was just a planning group and they were looking at even hosting a Snowarama in this area. So we have some really key, long-term dedicated people that are so committed to the event and so committed to the cause. And then we have the Yorkton Snow-Riders, which are a remarkable group of snowmobilers. It doesn't matter if there's no snow, if it's minus 40, or if it's the most remarkable snow conditions you've ever seen. They show up in droves, they show up with their pledges, and they're there no matter what. The snow conditions are an added bonus that we're all super pumped when it works out. But for that group, it's about the cause and the camaraderie and coming out and supporting.

And then I've talked to other groups and other people that say, you know, Snowarama is just part of the tradition of Yorkton around here. There's sponsors and supporters that have also been involved right from the very start or from the mid-80s. You know, GX94 was an original sponsor, so that's coming, you know, 50 years next year that they've been involved, which is really great. And we have lots of other long-term supporters and people that just show up every year. So I think there's there's a few things. For whatever reason, the community support in Yorkton and surrounding area is second to none and exceeds others, and we're just really lucky that it's continued for so many years. We have a really fantastic snowmobile trail system here too, because of the Snow-Riders, and that that helps too because it's worth coming to ride here.

Dick DeRyk

Kenn Propp's family started what is now Harvest Meats back in Rhein, Saskatchewan, about 125 years ago. The business moved to Yorkton in 1928 and grew into Midwest Packers on York Road, where Kenn joined his father Edward in the family business in 1974. It continued to expand its product lines and markets and is now Harvest Meats on the other end, the west end, of York Road. Kenn continues to be involved, while his son Geoff is now the company president, the fourth generation to lead the business. Kenn has been participating in Snowarama since the 1980s and is the all-time leading fundraiser, which earned him the National Easter Seals Canada Volunteer Award in 2022. But as Kenn explains, it wasn't about recognition. There was a compelling personal reason for him to get involved.

Kenn Propp

We grew up with an aunt who was mentally and physically challenged, and we also had a couple of cousins. We got involved, or I personally got involved because of that relationship that we knew, and more so, Dick, for the families, the caregivers. Most people don't realize how big a heart you have to have to spend your lifetime taking care of somebody that has those kinds of needs. The camp, giving that family a week of respite every year, to me is just so important. When you meet these kids when they go to camp, they're just in heaven. And it just melts your heart

when you see that. We grew up with it. So we know the kind of commitment that our family members had to make, the sacrifices they had to make to take care of those kids. That's why we got involved, and our company has been involved right since I got involved in the early 70s. We've always supported the Abilities Council. In fact, it goes back even to the days of the Lions School. We've been supportive for those personal reasons.

Dick DeRyk

How many years have you been doing this?

Kenn Propp

I was not riding a snowmobile early on. It was actually my brother-in-law Larry that got me involved in snowmobiling. So it would probably go back to maybe the mid-80s, somewhere in there, because it was, you know, completely a volunteer group that got together to start Snowarama. Nobody ever dreamed that it would last this long. Everybody that rides has their own reasons for doing it. And you know, some of them are personal, some of them are just to have a good time and raise some money, realizing that it goes to a good cause. A couple of years ago at the banquet, they actually started bringing families of some of these children along so that people that ride can get connected with these kids and children and families and see just what it takes and how important, how really important a camp is to these kids. You can talk about it, when you see it, it really does touch your heart. It really does.

Dick DeRyk

Kenn says the success of the local snowmobile club and the growth of Snowarama here, where others have shut down, has to be shared with others.

Kenn Propp

There were many of them in Saskatchewan, and they've all gone by the wayside. But you know, Dick, a lot of that goes to credit, you know, our local civic representatives too. You know, they granted us access to the city. We have a trail system where you can come in and you can stay, you can have food, you can re-gas. I think we were, if not, the first in the top five to actually have a municipality recognize that. So I don't want to forget about that because we still rely on council for our access. We realize that. We have signage that says this is a rider-privileged area when you come into the city, and we're very cognizant it is really a gift. We don't take it for granted. So, you know, kudos to the council of 30 or 50 years ago, I guess, that did that. It was a lot of work, a lot of it done by Art Bilous and Barry Bradshaw. It wasn't easy, but we've got it, and we really regard it as a privilege.

Dick DeRyk

Back in, I think it was 2019, the day that Snowarama took place, it was minus 30. I know you well enough to know that you don't have nearly as much natural insulation on your body as some of us do. You've gone through some cold rides, I'm sure.

Kenn Propp

Oh yeah. Back when clothing wasn't what it is today, yeah, we used to get really cold. But with the machines and the handlebar warmers and the thumb warmer and the clothing upgrades and the you know, light duty insulation that's in them, you know, people always say you're crazy to do that. But really, Dick, you don't get cold. I mean, the odd time if the wind is really blowing and you're out

in the open prairie, it it can give it to be bone chilling. But when you get in the bush, it's peaceful, it's quiet, it's serene, and when the big snowflakes are falling and you can't hear a tree fall in the forest or whatever that saying goes. It it really I can't describe it. For me especially, it's just a release that's attracted me to the sport, and of course, having good friends. I mean, when we started, we had a group of about 13 to 15 people and you know, slowly through various reasons, we're down to about... Anyway, maybe I'm a little bit crazy, I enjoy it. I always tell people, what do you what do you do in Saskatchewan if you don't enjoy the winter? We've ridden through extreme conditions, absolutely. That's just part of the sport. We've had machine failures in the middle of nowhere. We've had the tow them, we've had to double up and all kinds of those kinds of stories. So we've had some we've had some really crazy times, but they were good times.

Dick DeRyk

Larry Hilworth had a career in Yorkton as a banker and then as an implement dealer and farmer. He was one of the founding partners of Maple Ag and Outdoors on the corner of Road and Dracup Avenue. But now he and Kathy spent their winters in Maricopa, Arizona, where a group of friends and neighbours get together once a week to go for a long motorcycle ride. In 2022, that grew into something much more.

Larry Hilworth

I was talking with Rick Bilous, and Rick and Teresa we were out on a motorcycle ride, and my wife Kathy and Timmy Snowarama was coming up, and that's just after COVID. And I said, I guess there's some changes with Snowarama these days that because of COVID, they're not having an organized ride, they're gonna let everybody just kind of ride wherever and collect your money and submit it in. And I says, Well, why couldn't we just do that here in Arizona, right? Instead of going back and riding a snowmobile, why don't we just ride our motorcycles and we'll just go here? I mean, we usually go for a ride each week, and so we'll get the rest of the crew to sign in, and what do you think about doing that? And Rick says, Yeah, good idea. And he says, you know what? I used to always have breakfast before at Timmy Snowarama. I'll do the breakfast at our place. I said, Well, okay, and I'll do the hot dogs because we always had Harvest hot dogs, right? And so we had some insider information there, and that's how it got kicked off. And so we got the rest of our group together, most of them from Saskatchewan, and said we're going for a ride next week. Except this time it's gonna cost each of you guys \$150 which is the minimum pledge. And this one guy and I'm pretty good at imitating him, he said, Well, why would I want to spend \$150 to go on this ride that we always go on anyhow? I said, because it's for a good cause. There's always good causes, he said.

We got them on side, and Rick and I and Teresa and Kathy started collecting pledges. And I think the first year we pulled it off, I think it was like \$10,000. So we thought, boy, this is pretty good. I mean, it's \$10,000 that they didn't have. And I posted it on Facebook, and a girl by the name of Patty Pilon or Patty Gable, I knew her as Gable from Melville, I used to go to school with her sister, she's in Queen Valley down here in Arizona, and she got a hold of me. She says, Larry, LT, where are you guys gonna ride? I said, No idea. She says, Well, why don't you come to our place in Queen Valley? We got a nice little golf course there, and I'll get them to throw in some lunch, and then you can come up to my place down the hill, and we'll have a coffee and some donuts or whatever, and you guys can ride back. I said, Works for me.

When we got there, Patty had at this little golf course, small little town, a little golf course, and she had this banner that she painted up that said Timmy Snowarama, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Desert Chapter. And that's how the Desert Chapter was formed.

Next year, we as we introduced people to the cause, and they started to say, Oh, this is a pretty interesting thing. And, you know, there's some more fundraising, and and they started to know more about it, and we convinced other people to go on it, and we said, okay, let's do this again. So we did it again, and we pulled it off, and we went to the same location. Had a few people said we'd want to join in, but we don't have a motorcycle. Well, okay, what do you got? Well, we got a Mustang convertible, works for us, and so we did that again the next year, and we got more people involved. We did it last year again, coordinated it with the ride back home. We had, I think, maybe 19, 18, 19 people in about 14 vehicles. And I said, You guys, you know, in in 2024, we raised \$68,000. And I said, you know what? That was exceptional. I don't know if we could ever do that again, but you know, give it give it your best, you guys.

We started to raise money, in the morning when we were at Rick Bilous' having breakfast, everybody said, Well, how are we doing? How are we doing? What's the team doing? I says, I think we're at \$68,000, same as last year. Think can we crack 70? You think we can crack 70? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. So then there was one person there that wasn't riding with us. She's from Gerald, Saskatchewan. And we passed the hat around and we got her a thousand bucks. She says, Well, I got nothing to ride and I don't want to drive a motorbike. Well, you take a truck. So she took a truck and she followed up behind us. We hit 70,000, and as we're driving, I shouldn't even say this, but as we're driving, I'm on my phone seeing where we are and texting people, right? During that ride, the hour and a half ride, we got her up to 90 some thousand by texting people. We got to the restaurant, we're sitting at the restaurant, and everybody's well, how are we doing, Larry? How are we doing? How are we doing? And I says, Well, we're at 90, I think it was 92,000 dollars. I said, You think we could hit 100,000? Like that would just that would be incredible, right? So I leaned over to one guy that was a fairly big farmer, and I'm just a little gardener as a farmer. I says, Well, Harvey, you know, I got a small little farm, and I think if I could give \$500 more, you should be able to give a thousand. He says, Well, if I give a thousand, so and so should give two thousand. And before you know it, we hit \$100,000.

But it was so funny when we looked around this restaurant, and there's this 19 people or so that we had, and it just looked like a bunch of teenagers, because everybody was like this on their phones, phoning people, trying to get money, right? Texting back and forth. And so everybody really bought into it, and it was just so exciting to see. So, you know, we ended up with \$102,000 last year, and just exceptional from really 14 bikes and motorbikes and cars and vehicles, and like I say, 19 people or so. Just so heartwarming that we could collect some money from here, and we actually had some Manitoba people riding with us as well. They ride with us and says, Yeah, we'd help out. Some of us have pretty big rolodexes, so every dollar counts, and we just kind of reached into all our contact lists, and it's been a good cause. We have a lot of fun with it down here, too. It kind of mushroomed from what we initially thought. We thought we'd do this kind of as a one-time thing, and I think our total so far is \$254,000 that's been generated by the Desert Chapter.

We're doing it again, and let me tell you a quick little story that happened yesterday. My neighbor Rudy Flaman, who's been a good supporter of this project and quite a philanthropist and a pretty big heart, they moved away because they sold their place. And I texted him the other day, he's in

Mexico, and I says, Rudy, you're still part of the team. You know, I mean, we still want you involved. And he says, No problem. And he sent me a \$21,959 cheque for contribution to this year's program because he believes in the program and he's gonna continue to do it.

Yesterday, Kathy got a text message from a lady from Yorkton that's got a place here in Maricopa, didn't know that she had a place, and her name is Gerry Ann Fraser. They used to have Boston Pizza. Gerry Ann texted Kathy and said, Are you guys gonna be home today? Because our son Nick, who's got Down syndrome, has raised some money, birthday presents, and he wants to donate it to the motorcyclers. They came over yesterday. Nick had raised \$100 from birthday presents, and he said, I want to give it to the motorcycle group. And talking about touching, he's been a camp attendee before. During this, and he's quite a character, I says, Nick, would you like to sit on my motorbike and we could take a picture? Well, he smiled from ear to ear and put him on the motorbike, and he was just like, I've never seen a kid so happy. And brother-in-law Kenn says, Why don't you start it up? So I started it up. He sat on this thing and revered her a couple times, and he said something like, Okay, get out of the way. He was in 100% biker mode there.

I sent Gerry Ann a note last night. I says, Thanks for stopping by. We've been talking about Nick's visit ever since he left, and she says, Well, he's sitting there talking about his best day ever sitting on a motorcycle and feeling part of the group. And I says, you know, for the half an hour or whatever he was here, we got to park on the shelf all the life's pressures and issues and world issues, etc., and just be in his world for a little bit. And I'll tell you, was it ever heartwarming, gratifying, and Gerry Ann says, We made his day. I think he made our day.

All of us here, we believe in the cause. Last year, Pearl Flaman and Kathy went to camp with Deana just to see firsthand what it was like a camp. They felt like they were rock stars because everybody knew who this Desert Chapter was. There's so many good causes out there. It's just this is the cause that we picked because we used to snowmobile. We'll do this as much as we can, Dick. I mean, as people are starting to sell their places because of illness or because of Trump or because of whatever, crowd is diminishing, our group is diminishing to some extent, but we'll give her our best this year and who knows.

Dick DeRyk

Tamara Holowatuik started writing with her father Jerry in the early 2010s when she was about eight years old. She then started riding on her own and collecting pledges and was recognized as the youngest rider. She moved away from Yorkton in 2022, is now Tamara Kerluke, and has a career in marketing and fundraising in Saskatoon. But her memories of Snowarama are still vivid. And she comes back every year to ride in the event.

Tamara, you started at a young age with Snowarama, riding with your dad. What's your memory of that?

Tamara Kerluke

Before I started riding I remember going to the banquet every year. And I just remember meeting the Snowarama ambassador, because at the time they had an ambassador program running. They were usually around my age as a kid, and just like hearing about them wanting to go to Camp Easter Seal was really amazing. And then when I got to the point where my dad was comfortable putting me on a snowmobile, he was like, let's go in the ride and you'll ride with me. So I just

remember that it was a big milestone, and it was neat seeing all the snowmobiles on the trail for the first time. And it was always for a good cause. So I think that was a really touching opportunity for me to go out with my dad and then also raise money for Camp Easter Steel at the same time.

Dick DeRyk

When did you start riding on your own?

Tamara Kerluke

I think before you're actually supposed to. So probably 10 or 11. So yeah, it's probably that 10 or 11 age.

Dick DeRyk

But you would have probably been riding alongside your dad.

Tamara Kerluke

Yeah, and he would definitely take it slow with me as a beginner sledder for a busy day. And so Kaylee and Alyssa are our next door neighbors. They are also young writers like me, and we would go every year with them. So when our dads finally got the comfort to put us on the sled, we'd all go together, and that was kind of nice. So I had friends with me too.

Dick DeRyk

And you were raising money because you had to raise a few bucks in order to get in. Who did you hit up?

Tamara Kerluke

I went door to door in our neighbourhood. And then as I got more confident in myself, I would actually approach some local businesses. I started finding people's emails and just emailing them and kind of cold emailing, which was so interesting as a 12-year-old. And now I think back, I'm like, I was probably like one of those ones they'd flag for fishing or scam even. And then every year we'd go back to Manitoba on my mom's side for a family reunion. And I'd always hit up the cousins and aunts and uncles I haven't seen in a while. So a lot of it was like family, friends, and then kind of our neighbours.

Dick DeRyk

How much were you raising back in those days?

Tamara Kerluke

Just under a thousand dollars. But for me as a kid, that was a big deal because you get a lot of people that give like \$2 or \$5. So it was a lot, a lot of work to get a lot of donations.

Dick DeRyk

You're still coming back for Snowarama. This is something that's on your calendar?

Tamara Kerluke

Oh, absolutely, every year. So I moved away a few years ago. I still love Yorkton, and this is the perfect opportunity to come home, see everyone that I'm used to riding with it in every year, catch

up, and then I book it. Even my trips, I try to avoid that spot in my calendar. So if I ever can't attend it, it's because of work.

Dick DeRyk

When you first started riding, were they still recognizing the youngest riders or the youngest fundraisers at the time?

Tamara Kerluke

Yes, they were. I and I did get that recognition a few times. I can't remember how many times, but then I eventually grew out of the category.

Dick DeRyk

What's your most lingering memory of Snowarama?

Tamara Kerluke

Anything that really stands out for me, it's honestly the COVID year when everything was going but still virtually. It was really nice to still be able to go out and snowmobile, obviously doing it so safely, but because it was very much this concern of what's going to happen. Like we can't do the banquet, we can't do all of this stuff that we normally do. I guess that would be 2021. But it was such a good connection point. And it was the synergy that year was amazing. And I think after that it's kind of catapulted because nowadays there's other chapters that have started with Snowarama. You have Bowlarama, you have the Desert Chapter, and kind of from then on, I think it really just took traction, which is interesting because you don't really see that with a lot of events after COVID. It kind of hurt a lot of them, but that kind of gave more reach across the province. You had more people participating.

Dick DeRyk

On Saturday, they will ride again, and the Desert Chapter will take to the road on wheels in Arizona. The bowlers bowled last month for Bowlarama, and when it's all over here, the riders, families, and supporters will get together for a post-ride dinner awards and social at St. Mary's Cultural Center. Each year, one of the awards is for the oldest rider. Shirley George, who was an Ingham before she was married, started riding about twelve years ago. She lives in Edmonton, but spends parts of winter and summer at her cabin at Good Spirit Provincial Park on the lake, and became curious about all the sleds she saw in the community hall in the park on Saturdays in late February or early March. Turns out that's where the Snowarama riders were having lunch, and she decided to join in.

Her first year, when she was in her late 70s, she received the award as the oldest snowmobiler. "I felt greatly honoured," she told me, "Because that trophy is given in honour of Norbert Bisschop by the Joe Bisschop family." Norbert was an avid snowmobiler and rode in all Snowaramas until he died of an aneurysm while riding a snowmobile just north of Yorkton in 1994. Shirley received the award just about every year since she started. "I get the award merely because I'm one year older," she said. "Last year, I asked Barry and Rick to pass the trophy on to the next oldest letter, and that is what they did." In December, Shirley marked her 88th birthday. If she can juggle her schedule, she will be riding again this year. But she has something on in Edmonton the day before Snowarama, so is undecided. Maybe she'll ride. Maybe she'll make it back in time for the dinner.

But some things are sure. The weather will be what it is. Snowarama will happen Saturday regardless. The Desert Chapter will write the road Saturday and probably not have any weather concerns. And the bowlers did their part.

After that, on to the 50th anniversary event next year.

For a detailed schedule of the day's activities, visit our website, yorktonstories.ca and go to the Snowarama podcast page. There you will also find photos, links, and more information about Snowarama.

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