

Promoting diabetes awareness one roller ski at a time

“Team diabetes is a group effort, it shows what people can do if they work together on a cause that impacts millions of people.”

“My wife and I had a consistent message: ‘choose healthy foods and make physical activity part of your every day life.’”

After completing their expedition Alex and Nicole felt the need to

continue their efforts for diabetes

care and awareness. Looking for

another challenging activity, Alex

hopes to participate at the November

2006 Team Diabetes marathon, in

New York.

“Team diabetes is a group effort,

it shows what people can do if they

work together on a cause that impacts

millions of people.”

Team Diabetes, a fundraising

initiative to promote a healthy lifestyle

and support for research, education

and advocacy through the participation

in a marathon, was the perfect way for

the Nilsson’s to carry on their support

for diabetes awareness.

“It is a great way to spread the

message that diabetes is not one

person’s issue,” says Alex. “We all

need to work together for prevention,

management and education of this

condition.”



Alex Nilsson and his wife Nicole

In June of 2005, Alex took on a different type of challenge and crossed the country from one end to the other — on roller skis. Alex and his wife, Nicole completed 6100 km in 95 days and raised over \$2000 towards diabetes awareness. Nicole, who had been a diabetes educator for five years, found that many people living with diabetes lacked simple knowledge of maintaining a healthy lifestyle while living with diabetes. “We met quite a few people living with diabetes,” Alex says.

Alex Nilsson of Crescent, BC is no stranger to challenging sports and enduring physical activities. Even at the age of 71, this six-time marathon participant is still running whenever he can.

In June of 2005, Alex took on a different type of challenge and crossed the country from one end to the other — on roller skis. Alex and his wife, Nicole completed 6100 km in 95 days and raised over \$2000 towards diabetes awareness. Nicole, who had been a diabetes educator for five years, found that many people living with diabetes lacked simple knowledge of maintaining a healthy lifestyle while living with diabetes. “We met quite a few people living with diabetes,” Alex says.

of a second.
 Just a week earlier, the determined Nilsson came first in a duathlon in Cranbrook, beating longtime rival Fred Clarke by three minutes and placing second overall after an age adjustment.
 Clarke and Nilsson have been battling for first place in duathlons for the last five years. The duathlon consists of a three-kilometre run, five-kilometre cross-country ski and two-kilometre run.
 Clarke was leading by a good distance in the three-kilometre run. There were six runners ahead by the time Nilsson, in modified ski boots, reached the transition point but his boots saved valuable changing time, making him the second skier out of the track ahead of Clarke.
 Nilsson maintained his lead for one kilometre, when Clarke caught up and passed, retaining his lead to the finish. However, due to the age adjustment, Nilsson won the event, bringing him one step closer to his goal.

A senior Creston resident wants to be the best overall sportsman in Canada at a competitive level, a masters champion in cross-country skiing and to peak at age 70.
 In the Spokane Citizens' 10-kilometre cross-country ski race, Alex Nilsson, 68, placed first in the 60-plus age group. There were 380 racers from Idaho, Washington, Montana and British Columbia taking part in the event.
 Conditions were ideal for the challenging course, which began with an exciting mass start. The qualified elite group took off briskly over the undulating terrain, and at around two kilometres, Nilsson began gaining ground up the long hill. At about 6.5 kilometres, a long downhill run gave the skiers a breather.
 Despite the steady grind over the final 1.5 kilometres, Nilsson kept a strong pace with a 20-year old who finally beat him by 1/100ths.

By Christine Munknerud
 Special to the Advance

Setting his sights high

Alex Nilsson has no plans to slow down as he approaches his 70th birthday.



Advance file photo

SENIORS
 ...Age no
 barrier to
 aiming high
 in athletics.

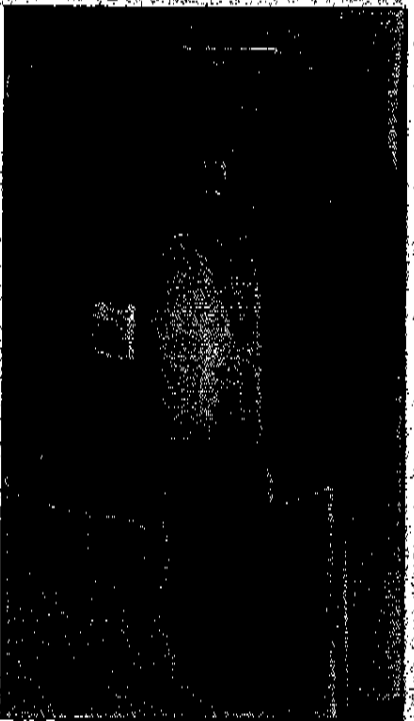


Alex Nilsson thought he was attending Monday night's town council meeting to accept a plaque for the diabetes society. He got the plaque, and more. Nilsson, who completed a 6,000-kilometer cross-country marathon on July 28, was joined by his wife and support driver, Michelle Snopce, for the presentation. Both appeared to be taken by surprise when Mayor Joe Snopce announced Alex has become the 10th person named as a freeman of Creston in recognition for his contributions.

This means you can go anywhere in town, Snopce laughed. In addition to having his name added to a plaque that is displayed in Town Hall, Nilsson also got a lifetime parking pass.

Past recognitions have gone to people including former mayors Lela Lyne and the late Eladio Salvador, the late one-time mayor of Kanihono, Creston's sister city in Japan, and the Creston Army Cadet Corps.

Alex Nilsson was named a freeman on Monday.



By Lorne Eckersley
Advance Staff

Roller skier Nilsson becomes freeman

Nilsson used the opportunity to challenge Creston Valley residents to take more responsibility for their own health and fitness.

We have been treated incredibly well over this summer, he said. It's just wonderful to be home again. We are very pleased to be members of this community.

Nilsson challenged Snopce to institute a Mayor's Walking Day in which he would lead anyone wishing to join in a five-kilometer walk. You could do that on a weekly basis, he said. It's a unique idea and I guarantee it would get a lot of publicity.

Nichole explained that the couple wanted to raise awareness of diabetes because it is a life-style illness.

We're available to speak to people about preventing diabetes. It's up to each of us, including myself, she said.

You are our heroes, Snopce said, in complimenting the presentations.

Continued from page 1.

More from M town council

See "More..." on page 15.

Journey offered little time for relaxation

Continued from page 1.

Between navigating the large vehicle, providing food "six to seven times a day" for Alex and communicating with people from around the world, Nichole said there was rarely time to relax.

"I think that I'm going to be writing a book about this trip," Nichole told the audience.

"I feel like I belong, like I've really bonded to this country," Alex said of the sense of connection he felt to the land as he saw it from a different perspective than usual.

"This is a humongous country, size-wise — I'd never given much thought to how vast it really is," he said, adding, "But it seems more compacted to me now."

Nilsson said he agreed with former governor general Adrienne Clarkson, who said, "We need to travel much more within our country to get to know one another."

Nilsson said he always had confidence he could complete his goal to ski from Victoria to St. John's, Newfoundland.

"Physically, it was no problem. But mentally, I wondered, 'How do you maintain the desire to keep going?'" That desire, he explained, never flagged.

"There was never a day when I would question, 'Why are you keeping going?'" he said. "There was

never a question in my mind that I was going to keep going until I ran out of land."

Surprisingly, it wasn't B.C.'s daunting mountain terrain that provided the Nilssons with their greatest challenge. Both Alex and Nichole singled out Northern Ontario as the most difficult part of the trip. Long, lonely stretches and narrow highways with no shoulders caused the greatest unease.

On several occasions, in different provinces, Nilsson was pulled over by police officers. All were unfailingly polite and supportive, once they learned the purpose of his travel.

"They needed to know I wasn't crazy," Alex laughed.

For much of the three-month trip, Nichole drove 10 kilometres, then cycled back to meet Alex. As the weeks rolled into months, though, she was busier and busier trying to keep up communications with her BlackBerry communications device. And she wanted to make sure the trip was completed in a timely manner.

"I found myself thinking, 'This seems further than 10 kilometres,'" Alex said.

"As the days wore on — when we got to 90 days and on — I drove a little further ahead each time," Nichole laughed.

When the couple reached Halifax they boarded a plane to fly to St. John's.



Nichole and Alex Nilsson at a reception at the community complex. (Lorne Ekensky photo)

"I realized when we took the ferry from Vancouver Island that I couldn't ski on water," Alex said.

When they arrived in St. John's they were greeted by media and diabetes volunteers, getting a motor escort to St. John's city hall and Mile Zero on the Trans-Canada Highway.

Reflecting on his experiences, Alex said he now has a new pet peeve, one he plans to start campaigning against: "Garbage — you never see it when

you are driving," he said. "But the amount of trash along the highway is disgraceful. It's disrespectful to the land."

Struggling off suggestions that his trip was heroic, Nilsson quoted an observation from Mother Teresa: "To achieve the miraculous you have to do the ridiculous."

Crestor
would like to
purchase the
your support!

Yahk Elementary a 'positive place'

- 1st Chevy Silver
- 2nd Chevy Equi
- 3rd Chevy C
- 4th Thrifty's V

5

Man, 70, completes cross-country ski trip

PEOPLE

BY TARA BRADBURY MULLOWNEY
The Telegram

run marathons, cycles, plays tennis and golf and goes downhill skiing when the weather permits. A retired public health employee, Nilsson is one of the few seniors around with wash-board abs.

Nilsson skied all the way from B.C. followed by his wife Nicole, in a more comfortable and average about 80 kilometers per day. He admits the going wasn't always easy.

It was different in different areas of the country in some places there was a lot of traffic and really narrow roads. I struggled a lot in places where the shoulder of the road was only a narrow strip, and I think I used up all my guardian angels," Nilsson said with a laugh.

Sometimes I would look down a stretch of road and think, 'oh really have the sumpion to do this?'

Nilsson also had to contend with the weather. Nilsson is no stranger to physical exertion, in addition to fitness training three or four hours each day he has

No show? No problem. A British Columbia retiree has just completed a cross-country ski trip to raise awareness for type 2 diabetes.

But Alex Nilsson, 70, was obviously not resting on his laurels. He had a long drive home from the ski trip, and he was still in good luck. He had a long drive home from the ski trip, and he was still in good luck.

Nilsson, who was born in Helsingfors, Sweden and lives in Creston, B.C., began his trek in the north of the province.

Compared to family members, Nilsson needed no extra help. His wife, a former nurse, was his constant companion. He had a long drive home from the ski trip, and he was still in good luck.

Nilsson said he felt better now than when he started. He arrived there Monday afternoon on a rainy day. He had a long drive home from the ski trip, and he was still in good luck.

See HEALTH-CARE page A2

Health-care savings

Continued from page A1

Although he was lucky in that he only experienced a few days of rain, the summer heat — especially in the Prairies and parts of Ontario ... was rough, he said.

"I got really hot during the middle of the day," he explained. "Sometimes I couldn't support myself by drinking and eating fast enough."

Nilsson, who says he figures he lost about five pounds of "baby fat" over the course of his trip, said he never thought about giving up the trek, even though his toes often became so sore that Nicole, a nurse, had to bandage them.

Nilsson is pleased with the attention he was able to raise for his cause through his cross-Canada voyage.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas either can't produce insulin or is unable to use it properly. With the increased consumption of sugary foods and inactivity in North America, this form of diabetes is on the rise.

"I think lifestyle changes will really do the trick when it comes to changing the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes," Nilsson said, adding that the disease is

reaching "epidemic proportions."

"It's frustrating to me when I see struggles with health care dollars, and so much of that money could be spent elsewhere. To a large degree, it can be managed with simple lifestyles like better eating and exercise."

Being a bit of a history buff, Nilsson's favourite parts of the journey include Quebec, the Maritimes, and this province.

"I enjoyed the countryside immensely and the strip between Quebec City and Rivière-du-Loup—I really enjoyed that, too," he said. "In Quebec we were able to take some of the nature trails."

"In New Brunswick there were places where the shoulder of the road was eight or 10 feet wide, and we were flying along. And of course, coming over to this fabled city was wonderful. It's very much like the old world—there are a lot of similarities."

The Nilssons only stayed in two hotels along the way—one in Winnipeg and one here in St. John's. Otherwise, they slept in their motorhome, camping in farmyards and parking lots.

"We generally wanted to begin exactly wherever the day had ended," Nil-



Alex Nilsson of Creston, B.C., takes a well-earned rest in his St. John's hotel room Monday after roller-skiing his way across Canada.

GARY HERBARD/THE TELEGRAM

son said.

Now that the couple has reached their destination, they are wasting no time. Nilsson will visit Mille O, near St. John's City Hall at about 11:15 this morning, where he will be met by members of the local chapter of the Canadian Diabetes Association.

Then, it's off to the harbourfront—on skis, of course—where he will amp-

ty a small bottle of water he took from the Pacific Ocean at the beginning of his journey.

"I haven't ever changed my activity level—I do the same amount of activity now at 70 that I did at 20," he said. "I never think, 'I'm too old, I can't do that.' I've never given a second thought to my age. It's no big deal."

tbnm@thetelegram.com