

Episode 25 | Mike Stiles Pt. 2

Sean Burdette 0:01

Um, I guess transitioning over to your current work. How did you get started with BCMOS?

Mike Stiles 0:10

Well, I guess you know, BCMOS started, as you know, the transition over from DUVS. It was a great program, but it was too hard to get funding for it, because people looked at, I mean, ultralights were not, you know, looked at in a very fair, a good light you could say. It's like, and then you throw on top, you know, you're quads, "No, you want to fly an ultralight and you're a quad?" Yeah. So it was difficult to obtain funding. What we did, we had a plane, but it got wrecked in a wind storm. So it was like, all that work is gone. So now we thought, "Well, we gotta get outdoors somehow." So we got this all terrain vehicle. It was a six wheel Argo, so it could go on water, on land. So we fixed that all up, I guess that's, so we formed BCMOS officially, and then pursued the outdoors and the all terrain vehicles. But again, that was, it was gas, the motor, and it was very limited trails we can go on. It was a great machine, it was parked at a gas station, and it was stolen. All that work, again, gone. So that, at that point, we started looking at, you know, should we get golf course carts, electric vehicles. And that's when we thought about doing something manual, and that's when the Trailrider was born. So, yeah, that was, you know, starting to pursue that. And at the same time, when Rick got home from his tour, he had a sailboat that Margaret Thatcher gave him. So at the same time we started a sailing program within BCMOS. But, you know, it had instantly become so successful, and that's where DSA was spun off into. So, like, I say it was, or thought of it, you know, it should have its own society. So that's when DSA Vancouver, was born. At that time, I've been on the board of BCMOS and DSA now, for over 30 years, from the beginning, I was on the board of ConnecTra as well, but I just dropped that because a little bit too busy for me. Anyways, yeah. So, I mean, the things I've seen in all the organizations is incredible. You know, the amount of people that have been touched by, you know, all the activities it, I mean, it's directly and indirectly, thousands of people, you know, and it's very humbling and gratifying to know that, you know, you had a piece in that. I just say, a small part, you know, Sam was the driving factor on all these societies. I was competing in sport and, you know, full time job, so all these things were taking up time so, and he was able to focus on the societies, but my small part of being there and assisting when I could, it was very humbling and gratifying for what has transpired over the years.

Sean Burdette 3:59

Could you tell us what is BCMOS?

Mike Stiles 4:03

Well, as you said, it's, you know, British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society, which is our, I guess our flagship has been the Trailrider. And, you know, recently we have the paddling program as well, and we have plans to also add adaptive fishing, which I'm, you know, incredibly passionate about as well, because I love fishing. And I run currently, a program through BC Wildlife Federation, it's called Fishing Forever Day, which is the BC Wildlife Federation, has over 100 clubs. So they asked the clubs in the province, if they could, you know, host a day of fishing for people with disabilities, so it's the location and all the equipment, yeah, so it's just, it's a great event, great cause, and fishing can be extremely empowering as well, and a really inexpensive program to run. I mean, you know, the equalizer is a fishing rod. You know, it doesn't matter how young, old, man, woman, even if you have a severe disability, you can all get out there and catch the same fish. Yeah, so now the progression of BCMOS is that adaptive fishing is added as well.

Sean Burdette 5:39

Absolutely. Tell us a little bit more about this adaptive fishing program. What sort of challenges have you faced, and where is it now? And where do you hope it, what are you hoping it will become?

Mike Stiles 5:53

Like I say, I'm passionate about it. You know, it can be done cheaply, can be very empowering. You know, like the DSA, the sailing program, you need a \$25,000 boat. With adaptive fishing, you can have a fishing rod and it's so versatile, and you don't need a sailing centre. So, you know, it's for a very little cost. It can be a very successful, empowering program. Yeah, I mean, I love going out fishing with my daughter. And the biggest problem is locations and finding accessible docks, which I'm very active in trying to work with, currently working with BC Parks and so, yes, trying to get adaptive fishing and an accessible pier here, yeah, so it's a great program, great activity. Besides, I love it. [Laughs]

Sean Burdette 7:03

Of course.

Mike Stiles 7:05

You know, there is a lot of equipment as well that can be purchased there. We're actively testing will potentially providing that kind of stuff for others as well.

Sean Burdette 7:20

Trailrider. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Mike Stiles 7:22

Well, what it is, basically a one wheel, uh, rickshaw type, you know, you get in the seat, and it's got one wheel under you, and it's got handles in the front and back, and there you go. It's been up Mount Kilimanjaro, and, you know it's a great piece of equipment. I think we build about 10 a year now, yeah, and they're, all over the world. Yeah, so it's a, you know, great piece of equipment. And you can go up mountains, so many places that otherwise are completely inaccessible.

Sean Burdette 8:20

You've been on BCMOS now for 30 years. What has motivated you to be so actively involved in this work?

Mike Stiles 8:29

It's, you know, seeing people empowered by the activities. The Trailrider, getting out in a canoe, or the paddleboard. It's all those things. You know, you said it's, 30 some years and I love seeing a smile on people's faces. It changes, sometimes it can change a person's life, like mine was at, this turkey shoot, but it's being able to provide that same type of experience, like say whether it's the Trailriders, sailing, or fishing, to be able to change somebody's life, that's incredibly motivating and humbling, wow.

Sean Burdette 9:20

Would you say it's the most rewarding aspect of your line of work?

Mike Stiles 9:24

Um, yeah, I mean, that's why, you know, I've been on the boards for so many years, because it's gratifying, like you say, being able to change somebody's life. I knew the person I was before I went to that shooting match, that turkey shoot, I know, I felt incredibly disabled, didn't know what I was going to do. It, boom, in an instance, my life changed. To be able to see that and do that for somebody else. Well, yeah, you can't beat that.

Sean Burdette 10:03

What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of your work?

Mike Stiles 10:07

The board stuff, you know, as an advocate for people with disabilities, it's the lack of attention to basic issues, I guess. Simple things that just don't need to be there, say basic sidewalks and parking is, you know, I live in Osooyoos and there's still stores that are not accessible, and we are just about the oldest average age community in the entire country, and to see that, and like I say, it was Rick Hansen who wheeled around the world 30 years ago trying to get that identified and still, today we see it in 2022. Yeah, I guess that's, the biggest frustration is people don't realize how bad it is until they're in a chair. So many of us, like, had an injury, or hip operation, or in a chair temporarily, or get hurt, they're just, "Wow, we just didn't know how bad it was," you know. And exactly, I mean, so, yeah, I guess that is the biggest frustration is not seeing the movement I would like to see.

Sean Burdette 11:31

How do we go about improving this?

Mike Stiles 11:36

Well, I guess there's federal legislation now, BC legislation to hopefully identify and fix that. I wish it was done. You know, the US had the ADA standards. I don't know how many years ago, 30, maybe a long time, I guess. Why has it taken that long? I just, thankfully it has happened. Now, they're currently working on the criteria and requirements work. But, you know, hopefully it's soon and there's serious impacts and consequences when people don't do some of this stuff. I know it's gonna be costly, but, it's beyond time to do it.

Sean Burdette 12:26

Oh, absolutely. You know, as a disabled individual and as an advocate for the disabled community, what have you learned about the disabled community as a whole?

Mike Stiles 12:40

Well, basically, with all the challenges, we are very resilient. And so many, you know, there's such an incredible group in the Okanagan, we just put our head down and we keep going, you know, everywhere in the province and across the country, same thing, yeah, we're here. We're still going. Myself, it's 37 years in the chair. Yeah, it's, you know, keep plugging away. I got young kids, and hopefully, they will get on board and help with that. No, I think more people should jump on. Everybody with a disability, tries their best to, you know, be advocates for the disability group. Yeah, as a population ages, just more and more people are going to have the same issues.

Sean Burdette 13:45

So is there anything that you've learned about yourself or maybe about society from your experience?

Mike Stiles 13:51

Well, I grew up on a farm in Alberta, and was always a hard-working farm kid, and I guess I'm still trying to try to plug away the best I can, you know. I see people want to change, but in some ways it's the cost factors. But I just wish that, you know, bite the bullet and just get along with it.

Sean Burdette 14:22

What is your advice to someone who is looking to become an advocate?

Mike Stiles 14:31

Well, I guess, let your views be known. That's what we can do. That's what everybody can do. A couple people are here and there. You know, voicing your opinions may not get attention, but if there's more of us all the time, more and more people. I mean, I think it's 25% um, are identified in the country as having some type of disability. I mean, we're a growing group and with the aging population slowly growing, let your voice be known. You know, I was never one that, I was a shy kid and gosh, you hate to say, "Man, this is not good. Do something about it." You know, fix it, not only for yourself, but for others. And that's again, this motivating factor, if you don't say it, not for yourself, but maybe for somebody else.

Sean Burdette 15:35

Right, absolutely. To close out our discussion today, we'd love to have you participate in our word association segment of our podcast. The way this works is, I'm just going to give you a word, and I'd like you to tell me how you feel it relates to the disability community, just the first thing that comes to your mind, and then we could have a bit of a small discussion about it. Does that sound all right with you?

Mike Stiles 16:00

Sure.

Sean Burdette 16:00

Cool. So the first word I have for you is accessibility.

Mike Stiles 16:06

More work to be done.

Sean Burdette 16:09

Well, said. I mean, you touched on it already, but we definitely have come, you know, I think we've made progress, but it's not enough. I think there's still much more to be done.

Mike Stiles 16:24

Yes, absolutely, more advocates.

Sean Burdette 16:28

Absolutely. The second word I have for you is determination.

Mike Stiles 16:35

But I guess I could say I'm quite determined. I plugged on for, you know, 37 years. I'm still going, still a lot to be done. Like I say, hey, I love seeing people successful, being successful, getting on with their life after an injury or disability. Yeah. So I guess I did it, you can do it too, yeah.

Sean Burdette 17:13

Third word is hobbies

Mike Stiles 17:17

Fishing. [Laughs]

Sean Burdette 17:20

Well, that was my last word for you, but yeah. [Laughs]

Mike Stiles 17:26

I mean, I love fishing. My eight year old was fishing. She caught her first fish at my Fishing Forever event when she was three. Complete natural. She caught three really nice trout. And at the end of the afternoon, at the end of the event, she caught 20, essentially caught 20. And the biggest was, like, you know, as big as the one in the poster. So, complete natural.

Sean Burdette 18:00

Yeah. [Laughs] Thank you so much for coming on today. Really do appreciate it.

Mike Stiles 18:06

You're most welcome.

Sean Burdette 18:07

Of course, and to all our viewers out there tonight, you guys have yourselves a good night.