

## Pedaling fitness - Holland Township man chosen to join governor in Mackinac Bridge crossing

By STEVE RALPH  
The Holland Sentinel  
Posted Aug 21, 2008 @ 11:30 PM

Holland Township, MI — Robert Luke was paralyzed in a car crash in 2001.

That won't stop him from crossing the Mackinac Bridge with Gov. Jennifer Granholm in the annual Mackinac Bridge Labor Day Run.

The Holland Township resident — appointed by the governor's office as one of 11 fitness ambassadors to participate in the annual event — said he sees it as an opportunity to educate the public about people with disabilities.

"It's an opportunity to meet people and to share with them that, even though a person may have adversities or some obstacles to overcome, there's lots of ways to continue in life," said the 54-year-old paraplegic.

"It's only by the grace of God that I'm here today, his gift through the surgeons who put me back together."

After the crash, Luke was confined to three months bed rest and suffered severe muscle atrophy. It took him several months of physical therapy and the aid of a personal trainer to help him build enough strength to become mobile in his wheelchair.

Within his first year of receiving a hand cycle, Luke completed 1,500 miles of hand cycling and has entered several races, including a 200-mile event that spanned Michigan from Holland to Ann Arbor. He now works with another paraplegic athlete to encourage him in outdoor activities. Luke hopes to inspire others facing adversity through the run.

"Maybe they're discouraged. Depression and obesity are major concerns today. Too many young people feel thwarted by everything that's happening so fast around them that they're not able to become contributing members of society," he said.

Luke will join about 300 runners leading the Sept. 1 5-mile run, a Michigan tradition since 1958. As fitness ambassador, he will receive a special recognition from the governor.

"The runners in this event serve as an inspiration to individuals making a commitment to better health," said Marilyn Lieber, president and CEO of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports.

"These ambassadors prove that commitments to regular physical activity are attainable, even despite various challenges. We are honored to have so many wonderful role models participating in this event," she said.

Luke, a board member for Holland-based Disability Network/Lakeshore, said he hopes his "run" will bring attention to organizations dedicated to helping people with disabilities.

"I'd like to promote to our governor how important it is, through different organizations, that they provide grants and funding for the 15 Michigan disability networks. With the right people heading those up and reaching out, it lessens the burden on society as a whole if people get connected with the right support group that can help them avoid obesity, depression, drugs and alcohol that come with escaping," he said.

"There's a narrow road and there's a wide road. Sometimes the wide road seems easy and the narrow road seems unattainable. It's not true."

Copyright © 2008 GatorHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved  
Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted