

I Ride with MS Ambassador: Jane Schmieding

Age: 63

Hometown: Madison

Bike MS Team: Positive Pedalers

Diagnosed with relapsing-remitting MS in 1978

It's been 36 years since she was diagnosed with MS and Jane Schmieding feels she's in the best shape she's ever been in her life. Her secret? "My attitude that I can try just about anything." That includes rock climbing, skydiving, rope courses, cross-country sit-skiing, kayaking and bicycling. She adapts each as needed for her MS, such as the hand-crank bike she borrows from her adaptive fitness instructor for rides in and around the Madison area. Although she may not be able to keep pace with other riders and needs her husband's help to get on to and off of the bike, "I like the feel of moving along fairly fast," she said. "I want to keep challenging myself to things that are a bit outside of my comfort zone and encourage others to do that, even if it's walking to your front porch or your mailbox. I'm keeping all my parts in shape so they can start working together when myelin repair comes."

More about Jane:

- Jane was diagnosed in 1978, before there were MRIs to help with diagnosis. She spent approximately two weeks at the hospital for "just about any kind of testing" to try to diagnose the cause of the balance issues she was having. The MS diagnosis came when they had eliminated everything else.
- "I remember my doctor in 1978 saying, 'If you were my wife, I would probably say don't have any kids,' but I ignored that and had my first child when I was 30," Jane says. She now has two adult children. (Researchers later identified that MS symptoms often improve during pregnancy.)
- Jane experiences numbness in her legs and feet, and also experiences spasms, all of which affect her balance. She always needs to have contact with something – walls and chairs in the house, a walker outside "or my scooter if I'm going any sort of distance or if I want to go faster than I can walk with a walker."

Possible Photo Opps:

- Jane and her husband, Steve, go on rides near their Madison home.
- Jane will also ride in a portion of the "[Pedal and Party in Pardeeville with a Purpose](#)" on July 26.
- Jane attends an adaptive fitness class (on the UW Campus on Tuesday and Thursday mornings) and works out on a sit-ski on wheels during the summer at a park in Verona.

Jane is a big proponent of adaptive fitness, and has given presentations on the topic:

“I feel that what makes me, me is trying to challenge myself. Once I found my ‘new normal’ and felt my MS symptoms were under control, I found a whole world that I wanted to challenge myself. The message is that MS doesn’t have to stop you from doing everything.”

“When I talk to people with MS, I try to tell them to do something, do some exercise. It may not be biking or cross country skiing, but it might be walking a little farther than you used to or using soup cans for weights to exercise your arms. If it’s a part of you that’s moving, keep it moving. Exercise whatever you can. It’s a move it or lose it kind of thing, and early on I don’t think I moved it enough.”

Here’s how Jane describes Bike MS: TOYOTA Best Dam Bike Ride:

“The Best Dam Bike Ride is one of the largest fundraisers for the National MS Society so it’s important to me, but also, I know a lot of bikers and they say it’s one of the best supported rides that they’ve ever been on. That’s from people who have been on a lot of rides! So as a volunteer it’s important to me to help keep up that standard of support so the cyclists will keep coming back and doing the ride and informing others that this is one of the best damn bike tours you can go on.”

Here’s how Jane describes the I Ride with MS program:

“I know a number of people with MS who are riding and I think it’s important to show that we support it and ride it, and have the determination to do so. ‘I Ride with MS’ is a terrific way to show it. There are so many things about MS that so many people don’t even realize, so when you have a special shirt on, it’s a great thing because it’s helping to educate. I like to let people know about things that people with MS *can* do that they might not think they can. I can’t do the 75 miles (personally) but there are people with MS who can do it. Having MS is not something that has to end everything that you enjoy.”