

renew

QUARTERLY

JULY 2007

From Family Practice to Band Practice

Forever Young and
Fun on Galena's
Main Street

A Decorah Physician's
Passion for Pedaling

Discover Iowa's Best
Recreational Trails

Continuing Medical Education Opportunities

A comprehensive listing from August through January



Photos courtesy of Dr. David Bakken

Dr. Bakken and his wife Kathy at the origin of the Danube River in 2003 en route to Vienna.

By Renee Brincks

A Decorah Physician's Passion for Pedaling

When the Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI) rolls from Rock Rapids to Bellevue this July, Dr. David Bakken will be among the riders.

The Decorah physician has pedaled all over the world. He's cycled through Glacier National Park and into the Canadian Rockies. He's climbed California's coastal cliffs and traced parts of the Oregon Trail. In addition to crossing the country more than once, he has even cruised the Swiss, French and Italian Alps, the Dolomites and the Black Forest on two wheels.

Though Bakken and his family have taken to trails around the globe, his favorite ride is the one that showcases his home state.

"I really like RAGBRAI," says Bakken, who lists homemade food, church suppers, high school bands and entertainment among event highlights. "All the little towns put their best foot forward and it's a treat to see that part of Iowa is still alive."

A product of small-town Iowa, Bakken was raised on a farm outside Ridgeway and attended high school in Cresco. He studied medicine at the University of Iowa and, shortly after graduating in 1969, started a military internship at the National Naval Medical Center. Trained as a flight surgeon, Bakken spent the early 1970s with a squadron that traveled mainly between Hawaii and Southeast Asia.

In 1974, Dr. Bakken and his family returned to northeast Iowa. He and his wife, Kathy, had four children at the time (today they have six children and five grandchildren) and they chose to settle in Decorah. For the next 26 years, Bakken worked in family practice at Decorah Clinic – Mayo Health System. He retired in 2000, but

hasn't left the profession completely. He now averages about 50 hours a week as an emergency room physician at Winneshiek Medical Center.

Throughout his practice and his "retirement," Bakken has used bicycling as a way of achieving balance. Early in his career, he'd head to work before his kids awoke and often didn't return home until they were in bed for the night.

"A medical practice, and a family practice in particular, can be a 24/7 job if you let it," he says. He credits his wife with lending perspective.

"She's been my guiding light, in terms of direction," he says. "She started us on these bike trips, and it's fun to do things like that with my family."

One of the Bakken family's memorable bike trips was the Iowa 150 Bike Ride, a 1995 event that promoted the state's 1996 sesquicentennial.

"We took our six kids in an old Ford van with bikes on the top and drove to Long Beach," Bakken remembers. "And then, we rode across the country."

Approximately 300 cyclists took part in that trip and many, including David and Kathy Bakken, still gather for reunion rides.

Since then, cycling adventures have taken the couple from Seattle to Virginia, down the Wisconsin River, and as far away as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands.

They appreciate the local connections that come with the sport.

"The nice thing about bicycling is that you stop and talk along the way. You learn about the farmers, the winegrowers, the horse racers and everybody else," says Dr. Bakken. "You see a lot more at 12 miles per hour than at 75 on a highway."

What Bakken also likes about biking are the health benefits. He often recommends cycling to patients as a low impact exercise that works many muscle groups and improves cardiovascular health.

With miles of dirt trails and paved paths, those Decorah-area patients have ample biking options. Men's Journal has

called the city "Iowa's mountain-biking capital," and Bakken is among a group of local leaders raising funds to continue trail expansion. "Trails of Winneshiek County" is a citizens group working to secure \$5 million for a paved, 12-mile path circling the city of Decorah. The trail will meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and offer access to local trout streams; it will welcome cyclists, inline skaters, birdwatchers and cross-country skiers all year long.

"We're getting close to our funding goals," says Bakken. "The trail project is exciting, and it's going to offer some pretty spectacular vistas."

Decorah's natural beauty – from towering limestone bluffs above the Upper Iowa River to lush hills and old maple forests – was one draw when Bakken moved back to the area in 1974. Proximity to his family and his wife's family was another. Also important were the people.

"When you're a physician in Iowa, it's not necessarily money that appeals to you. It's the people. They generally still have a good work ethic. There is a low crime rate. Many of them grew up on farms and they've learned the value

of hard work. They know how to help others," he says.

Bakken advises patients, and other doctors, to always make time for people and for personal pursuits.

"The toughest decisions you'll ever make are around how to spend your time," he says. "To keep from getting stale, you have to take a break once in a while."

When he reenergizes on RAGBRAI this summer, Bakken will add one more credit to his biking resume: riding in the same event as pro-cyclist Lance Armstrong.

"I think Lance is a fantastic person. The things he's done and the recovery he's made are nothing short of a miracle. It takes pure determination and will-power. He appears to be raising cancer awareness and it's wonderful. I feel privileged to be on the same bike ride and I can't say how much I admire him."

Iowa native Renee Brincks is a travel, health and lifestyle writer currently based in Monterey, CA. She plans to ride RAGBRAI herself, someday.



Dr. Bakken climbing a steep hill in France.