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Special Olympian first to make 300-mile snowmobile ride

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MAHTOMEDI — Their first day on the ski slopes together, it took Special Olympian Steven Eull and his coach Jason Reinsch two hours to make it down the beginner hill.

These days, Eull, 22, of Mahtomedi, skis black diamonds by himself. And the adventurous athlete is making history in another Special Olympics activity. He'll be the first Special Olympian ever to participate in the Northland 300 — a three-day, 300-mile snowmobile ride to benefit Special Olympics Minnesota.

Snowmobilers from across the state come together each year to ride from Two Harbors to Ely and back, raising more than \$2.8 million over the ride's 20-year history. Reinsch and Eull are making the trek together this year, Jan. 21 to 25.

Eull, who has Down syndrome, has no qualms about his upcoming journey. The 2001 Special Olympics Male Athlete of the Year loves winter and adventure.

"What the heck, I'm in," Eull recalled was his response when his ski coach of 12 years invited him to do the ride. Instead of collecting pledges, the pair, as well as their friends, family and teammates, are selling \$5 raffle tickets for a raffle being held during the ride. Half of the proceeds they raise go to Special Olympics Minnesota and the other half stays with the Area 12 (east metro) Flames team, of which Eull has been a member since age 8.

Steven's mother, Patsy Eull, manages the team of approximately 75 athletes who participate in multiple sports. Along with skiing, Steven does swimming, bowling, golf, softball and track. As a Global Messenger, Steven also speaks about Special Olympics at various events. When he's not participating in Special Olympics, he studies piano and karate (he's a brown belt) and works at Merrick Inc.

A 2004 graduate of Mahtomedi High School, he was a homecoming king, performed in all the school plays and gave a speech at his graduation ceremony.

"He's definitely a performer," Patsy said.

"He has one of those magnetic personalities," Reinsch said, adding that some have affectionately nicknamed him "Hambone."

Reinsch and Eull's relationship has grown to beyond just the ski slopes. They spend many weekends fishing, going to movies and doing other activities together. Eull was even a groomsman in Reinsch's wedding.

Volunteering for Special Olympics is so rewarding, Reinsch said, because the athletes greatly admire and appreciate their coaches.

"Come to one event and you're hooked," said Reinsch, an electrician from Brooklyn Park.

The athletes give as much as they receive, Reinsch and Patsy said.

"He's taught me so much," Reinsch said of Eull, including perseverance and good sportsmanship.

Eull has won many medals and ribbons, including a gold and two silvers in swimming at the National Games in 2006. But Eull is proud as long as he can say he tried his best and supported his teammates.

Once at a track meet, for example, Eull was nearing the finish line when he realized another athlete had gotten confused and wasn't running. Eull turned around, took the other athlete's arm and they crossed the finish line together.

"They care more about each other than about winning," Patsy said.

Above all, Reinsch said he's inspired by Eull's positive attitude.

"If I have a bad day, I call Steven up and my mood changes in a minute," Reinsch said.

"I'm always happy; that's me all right," Eull said.

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Jason Reinsch, left, and Steven Eull take a practice ride before participating in a 300-mile snowmobile ride to raise money for Special Olympics Minnesota. - Submitted photo

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