

News

Vernon native earns inaugural award

Morning Star Staff

Growing up in Vernon, Michael Schratte knew he was different.

He had difficulties in social situations, was hyper and was not able to focus in school. He was placed in gifted classes but underperformed. His curiosity led him to research into what was going on. At 10 years of age, he read Encyclopedia Britannica every night and learned

about mental illness.

Throughout high school, Schratte had problems with his self-esteem and depression. His parents didn't understand him and figured it was due to teenage hormones. He ended up living with his friend's parents in his senior year, moved to Vancouver after graduation and worked as a bartender. Later, he moved back with his parents at his father's encouragement, but his depression only worsened. He tried taking his own life but realized that it would only hurt his family. The traumatic event led him to getting the help he needed.

He was diagnosed with hypomania, a form of bipolar disorder as well as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD.

In a bid to foster greater awareness of mental health issues and help empower people dealing with mental health challenges, Schratte embarked on his "Ride Don't Hide" cycling journey on Aug. 1, 2010 with the goal of cycling 40,000 kilometres around the world.

The Vancouver school teacher has raised more than \$42,000 for



DOUG FARROW/DUGMEDIA PHOTO

Michael Schratte is the first recipient of the Mental Health Advocates award for his public battle with mental health illness stigma.

youth and children's programs for mental health, and hopes to raise at least \$100,000 by the time he is done.

His solo journey brings him to Vernon Oct. 13 to 16.

Schratte's journey was interrupted Thursday as he was

flown to Kelowna as the first recipient of an award named for revered mental health advocate Dr. Nancy Hall, the Nancy Hall Public Policy Leadership Award.

The award was presented on behalf of the Canadian Mental Health

Association (CMHA), B.C. Division at the National Conference on Mental Health in Kelowna, by David Hall, Nancy's brother.

David, who, like his sister Nancy, has had a long term focus on public policy and health, told the audience that Schratte's response to his mental health challenges has been inspiring.

"Unable to accept the stigma that continues to linger around mental illness," Hall said, "he has taken it upon himself to get on his bicycle and pedal around the world to spread the message that mental illness is a disease like any other."

Schratte was back on the road Saturday, pedalling from Thunder Bay on the final leg across Canada. After crossing six continents and 30 countries, he may face his greatest challenge to complete the ride to Victoria without encountering winter conditions in the mountain passes on the way to the coast.

As he heads back on his lonely solo trek across the TransCanada Highway, Schratte will stop and pay homage to the young man who inspired him to undertake his Ride Don't Hide Mission, Terry Fox and his Marathon of Hope, just outside Thunder Bay.

Those interested in Schratte's journey can follow his progress, share their own stories, sponsor him by the kilometre, or find out where he is and go out and cheer him on, at www.ridedonthide.com.

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