

## Tales from the Trails – Featuring the Great People from Michigander 2009

### *The Face of the Finish Line*

By Sarah Siewert



Samuel Kennedy came to his first Michigander Tour by himself 17 years ago with a Huffy bike and a borrowed tent. He hardly knew how to shift, and did not know anyone. While reflecting on his first tour Kennedy said, “Everyone was smiling, willing to help and it felt like a community. They were young, old, black, white and it didn’t matter – everyone was getting along and having a great time.” After riding his bike for seven days and more than 300 miles, he was looking forward to reaching the finish line. But when he arrived at the finish he recalls it felt empty, and was missing a sense of excitement. Once he crossed the finish line he took off his shirt and started waving it in the air, encouraging the rest of the riders.

Thus began the Michigander tradition of Kennedy, now known to fellow-riders as “Pitbull”, to be the official welcome committee for when riders come home. Over the years he has developed a strong connection to the tour, even choosing it as his honeymoon destination, and has become a staple of the ride. Every July he gets an early start on the last day to set up the finish line. With the help of volunteers, he now has hand-made checkered flags, bubbles, music and a distinct outfit to greet riders. Today, Kennedy is at the finish blowing his whistle and shouting “300 miles, lookin’ good, let’s go!” He is sure to make people aware that there are riders coming in and they should be recognized and appreciated for their accomplishment. Kennedy stays at the finish line cheering for hours because as he said, “I do not leave until every warrior comes home.”

