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Pines family pedals through California to help Best Buddies

A Pembroke Pines family took a California bike ride for Best Buddies.

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It did not take a 100-mile bicycle ride in California for the Sayih guys from Pembroke Pines to prove family love, but they did make a point. "We came in second to last but we didn't let each other down," said Jim Sayih, father of Adam, 17, Michael, 16, and Joey Pistone, 17. They cycled hills up to 6,000 feet in elevation and dipped to sea level along the Pacific Coast Highway from Chateau Julien Wine Estate in Carmel to the Hearst Castle in San Simeon for Best Buddies International. Best Buddies, a program that matches kids with disabilities with mainstream kids for fun and friendship, was the cause. Michael, a sophomore at Cooper City High, was the family's lightning rod.

Michael has Cerebral Palsy, a disorder that causes speech difficulty and muscular paralysis over most of his body.

"Being in the mountains up so high was beautiful. It meant a lot to me to be able to do it," Michael said. He rode in an extra large jogging stroller affixed like an Asian rickshaw to his father's bike. His brothers cycled behind

Jim Sayih, a Retired Miami Police Lieutenant and founder and director of the 40,000-member 911 Fitness program and Fitness Commitment Institute, and a 2008 Winner of the President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports Community Leadership Award, said Michael was their inspiration. "Michael kept calling, 'Keep going, keep going,'" he said. "At many times I was pulling 160 pounds uphill at five miles an hour but we kept momentum, looking and waiting for the next plateau." Adam and Joey, both members of the Charles W. Flanagan High School Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, could have gone ahead but kept pace with their dad and brother. Together, the team raised \$4,000 for the organization.

Event developer Bill Dykes said he was moved by the family's spirit and determination. "It was an incredible example of how we all should approach the challenges in our lives," Dykes said.



ALL TOGETHER NOW: Adam Sayih, 17, left brings up the rear as dad Jim Sayih pulls brother Michael Sayih, 16, along the Pacific Coast Highway in California.



INTRODUCTION: California First Lady Maria Shriver introduces Jim Sayih, Michael, in chair, Joey Pistone and Adam Sayih at Buddies Event
Bill Dykes/Best Buddies

Chairwoman Maria Shriver, wife of California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and sister of Anthony Kennedy Shriver, who started Best Buddies in 1989, introduced Jim Sayih and sons to 1,000 other participants at an after-event party. Ride Director Mike Collins said the ride brought in \$3.5 million for the program that reaches 350,000 people in 40 countries worldwide.

Michael, a member of Best Buddies at Cooper City High, said the experience was one he will never forget -- right up there with white-water rafting in Tennessee, serving as the first wheelchair Pembroke Pines Police Explorer and playing baseball with the West Pembroke Pines Optimist Miracle League.

Next? Hiking the Grand Canyon. Then, maybe, sky diving. "I want other kids with disabilities to know that they can do anything if they put their mind to it," Michael said.