Last night in Breckenridge Colorado our Tony Santilli was awarded the Jim Winthers award (described below) NEHSA nominated Tony for this award the nomination reads as follows.

It’s with great honor and pleasure that we nominate Tony Santilli for induction into the National Disabled Ski Hall of Fame.

Tony was one the first disabled skiers in New England and one the founding members of the organization now known as New England Handicapped Sports Association (NEHSA). The organization started at Haystack Mt in Vermont in 1970s and moved to Mount Sunapee in New Hampshire where it today has become one of the pre-eminent adaptive ski programs in the country.

In the earliest years as a disabled skier, Tony volunteered to do outreach to spread the word about skiing for the disabled. He was particularly dedicated in recruiting Disabled Veterans and Volunteers. He built a strong core group of adaptive ski instructors and volunteers who would continue to teach other Veterans and civilians with disabilities how to ski. He also helped build a core group of volunteer adaptive ski instructors who are still very much involved in the adaptive ski world today. From its inception, Tony was involved in Adaptive Ski Racing at the local, regional and national levels. He unselfishly helped other disabled skiers to participate in the developing adaptive ski racing circuit. Tony consistently placed in the top disabled skiers at all levels. He had won several medals.

He participated in many Race Camps offered by the coaches of the U.S. Disabled ski Team where he was instrumental in recruiting other disabled skiers to attend these race camps, not only to improve their racing skills but to improve their overall skiing skills and self esteem.

As a PSIA certified instructor, Tony also participated as a three track ski instructor in many DSUSA Ski Spectaculars and the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinics in Colorado. He served as a mentor and coach for all levels of adaptive skiing as well as ski racing. Tony is the Co-Founder of the New England Winter Sports Clinic for Disabled Veterans which has been held at Mt. Sunapee since 1997. This clinic provides rehabilitation to disabled veterans through participation in adaptive sports. Through participation in this clinic, several hundred Veterans with limb loss and other disabilities from New England and throughout the country have learned to ski, snowboard, kayak, and participate in other adaptive sports and life skills. After attending these clinics, Veterans with significant impairments return to their families, homes and communities with a renewed sense of pride, self esteem and accomplishment. Many disabled Veterans have gone on to become adaptive skiing, snowboarding, kayaking and other sports instructors. Attendance at this clinic builds physical, psychosocial and other life skills. Tony’s enthusiastic leadership, mentorship and presence at these events provides an outstanding example to others that “If I can do this, I can do anything”. Similar to the national program, several adaptive sports activities are provided at this clinic including racing at Tony’s insistence.

Although he faced challenges of his own as a returning Viet Nam Veteran, Tony always looked out for his fellow Veterans, and did whatever was needed to provide quality adaptive ski and racing programs as a form of physical, psychosocial and psychological rehabilitation. He was a pioneer in developing programs that are taken for granted today. His passion, sense of humor, enthusiasm, dedication are unequaled by anyone else in the adaptive ski and ski racing world.

Awards:
NEHSA Rising Star award
Ben Allen Cup winner
Earl Plummer award for volunteerism
Life Time Achievement Award from New England Handicapped Sports Association,
Induction into the New England Wheelchair Hall of Fame,
Olin E. Teague Award by the Veterans Administration through the U.S. Congress for the rehabilitation of war wounded Veterans.

Click here to watch the slide show that was played at the award ceremony.

The Jim Winthers Volunteer Award

The Jim Winthers Volunteer Award recognizes life-time contributions and significant achievements in furthering the mission of Disabled Sports USA. Nominees for this award must have contributed a minimum of 10 years of service to Disabled Sports USA or one of its chapters.

The Jim Winthers Volunteer Award is named in honor of Jim Winthers, a WWII veteran who was a member of the U.S. 10th Mountain Division- the Skiing 10th- an elite group specifically trained for alpine warfare. He eventually became a pioneer in teaching adaptive skiing, beginning with two friends who became amputees in the war; he taught them to ski on one leg using techniques he saw in Europe. Jim Winthers, with the support of other veterans, founded Disabled Sports USA in 1967.

To see past winners or nominate a person or organization this year, please click here