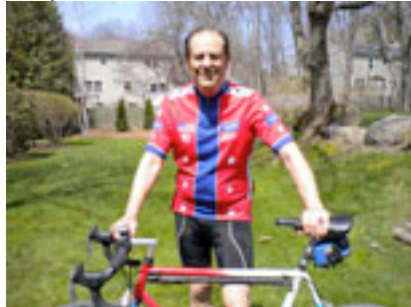


# *Don Kjelleren brings Vermont Senior Games to the Champlain Valley*

Wed, Jul 6th 2011 01:05 pm



by Phyl Newbeck

For Don Kjelleren, the transition from globetrotting businessman to sports and fitness promoter started with a glance between his feet. When he was 49 and living in Delaware, the DuPont executive stepped on the scale and realized he was 50 pounds heavier than he wanted to be. Kjelleren vowed to run the New York City Marathon for his 50th birthday. He did, and for good measure, ran it four more times. "I made a total lifestyle change," he said, "and became very active physically." At 60, Kjelleren took early retirement and embarked on what he called the "Great American Adventure," devoting a year to climbing the highest peak in every state (although he was unable to climb Mt. McKinley for logistical reasons) as well as bicycle 100 miles, run 10 miles, and swim one mile in the capital of every state in the union. He started the challenge at midnight on his 60th birthday and finished with 19 days to spare.

As a result of his personal quest, Kjelleren began to promote physical fitness for others and became involved in the National Senior Games. He served on the board for 10 years, including several as vice chair before retiring to Vermont. Last year, the Shelburne resident was pulled out of retirement to run the Vermont Senior Games Association (VSGA), the state affiliate of the national games and

immediately placed his imprint on the organization.

The first thing Kjelleren and his new board of directors did was change the name of the organization from the Green Mountain Senior Games to the Vermont Senior Games Association to highlight the fact that it is a stepping stone to the national competition. The second thing was to move the majority of the events to the Champlain Valley where there is a bigger population base; basketball is one event that has not moved and will remain in Castleton. Last year, roughly 200 people competed, split evenly between Vermonters and out-of-staters, but Kjelleren would like to increase that number to 1,000. In furtherance of that goal, he has expanded the number of events from 11 to 15 with the hope of getting up to 18. Additionally, there are some events that are not part of the national games, such as weight lifting, candlestick bowling, and pickle ball, which is tennis played on a smaller court.

"We're making this organization a significant player in the health and well-being of the senior community," Kjelleren said. To do so, the organization plans to add non-competitive activities such as a walking club. The Delaware Senior Games had a walking club of 6,000 people. Kjelleren hopes to start out with a few hundred when he launches the club in the fall.

Next year, Kjelleren plans to add winter events to the VSGA roster and aims to hold both sets of seasonal events within a condensed period. He has already worked on pulling the summer events closer together chronologically, but would like to improve on that aspect too. Kjelleren is proud of the fact that the organization has specific coordinators for every event; someone he describes as an "advocate" for their particular sport. That person is in charge of making all the arrangements and connections. An avid cyclist who takes part in both local and national events (this year he competed in the national senior games in the 20K and 40K road races and the 5K and 10K time

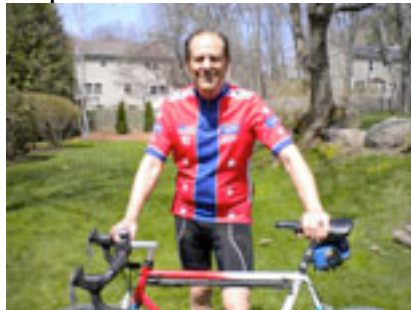
trials), Kjelleren is in charge of the cycling events. Kjellerin has also made registering easier and has provided an on-line option, created a website, and written newsletters that are available online. "We've brought the games out to modern times and we're operating it like a business," he said.

Kjelleren stresses that although the VSGA is a competition, the goal is simply to get those 50 and over involved in physical activity for "fun, fellowship, and fitness." He believes many competitors are there for the social aspect. "They don't care if they win a medal," he said. "They just like doing something more than banging a tennis ball on the side of their house."

To learn more about the Vermont Senior Games, go to [www.vermontseniorgames.org](http://www.vermontseniorgames.org).

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