

2009 Amputees Across America Riders

DOC MILLIGAN, a Dayton, Ohio, native, is a 63-year-old amputee. In high school, he played football and baseball and competed in track and wrestling. He entered active service with the U.S. Navy in November of 1965 and served until December of 1969, when he was discharged due to a bone disease in his legs. Until the age of 45, Milligan worked as a plumber, participated in AAU wrestling and raced BMX bikes with his son Sean. At the age of 60, after years of severe pain, he lost his left leg below the knee. He enjoys helping others set goals and taking life one step at a time. In addition, he is a self-taught sand artist of Western and North American art. He thinks of himself as an ordinary guy doing ordinary things. This is the first year Milligan has participated in the Amputees Across America tour.

AMBER "AJ" JOHNSON, a 32-year-old, third grade teacher in Macon, Georgia, is a double amputee, who lost her left leg six years ago and her right leg less than two years ago due to a car wreck that crushed both ankles at age 17. She participated in the 2006 Amputees Across America tour as a single below-the-knee amputee. She again joined the tour in 2008 – as a double amputee – and learned to ride a bike, as well as walk, while on the tour. Johnson has a great ear for listening. With a wonderful sense of humor, she shares her many experiences as an amputee and supports those who are facing physical challenges. She sees her physical challenges as an immense opportunity to reach people and hopes her message of being "differently-abled, not disabled" is one that people of various ability levels will remember. In addition, she enjoys spending time with her two West Highland White Terriers.

ABEL CRUZ is a 56-year-old left leg above-the-knee amputee from Albuquerque, New Mexico. After retirement from the U. S. Navy at the rank of Chief Petty Officer in 2001, Abel worked as a mortgage loan officer. In August of 2005, Cruz was traveling by motorcycle to visit U.S. Navy friends when a wheel from a semi-truck in tow traveling in the opposite direction came loose and struck him. His injuries from this accident included an above-the-knee amputation complicated with left shoulder, left femoral neck and pelvic fractures. As a patient at HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital of Albuquerque, Cruz was pedaling a stationary bike before he could even walk. During his hospital stay, Cruz joined the Amputees Across America group for the 2006 ride-in ceremony held at HealthSouth Albuquerque. The following year, he was recruited to join the group and has participated each year since. This year, Cruz will lead the Amputees Across American group from California to Missouri. Cruz is an inspiration to many people everyday and when asked if he could change the outcome of his incident if possible, he replies, "My amputation has made me who I am today. It has shown me that I can survive, it has shown me my strengths and that I can live life to the fullest."

JOE SAPERE, a 68-year-old retired Air Force Colonel, is the oldest rider in the group. Sapere lost his left leg below the knee due to a mid-air collision with another sky diver in February of 2000. Born in Yonkers, New York, he attended college at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, and entered the United States Air Force in 1963. In 1989, he retired from the Air Force and began a second career as an elementary school teacher. After his injury and rehabilitation, Sapere, an avid cyclist, spends every day riding, weather permitting, and has returned to the sport of skydiving. Since his amputation, Sapere received an Ertl bone bridge that enables him to sustain high forces on his residual limb while engaging in high impact activities such as skydiving and endurance cycling. His goal in life is to demonstrate to other amputees that life gets better despite amputation. In 2002, Joe founded Amputees Across America. Each year, he is joined by other amputees to make a coast-to-coast bicycle trip visiting amputee and other rehabilitation patients at HealthSouth Hospitals. This year, he will lead the group from Missouri to New Jersey.

