

DALMAC... The Epic Ride and Decades of Improving Cycling in Michigan

by Karen Gentry

It all started with a bone spur. The DALMAC (Dick Allen Lansing to Mackinaw) bike tour and DALMAC Fund all came about because namesake Dick Allen, an avid runner and downhill skier, hurt his foot.

“I had a heel spur that bothered me if I ran very much so I switched to cycling,” said Allen, 83, a retired Michigan legislator, farmer, veterinarian and downhill ski instructor from Ithaca.

As he rode more on his wife’s three-speed bicycle, he experienced the limitations of riding bicycles on Michigan

roads and began to advocate for cyclists’ rights. A State House Representative of the 88th District, he introduced legislation in the early 1970s that was met with resistance.

A fellow legislator told Allen that “bicycles don’t belong on the roads” and surmised that they belonged on sidewalks. In 1971 Allen flippantly mentioned to colleagues that he wanted to ride his bicycle to Mackinaw City to join Governor William Milliken for the Mackinac Bridge Walk on Labor Day, although he had no idea if he could make it or not.

To prove that bicycles are transportation, Allen and a small group of friends in cutoff shorts with road bikes, loaded camping gear in a camper driven by his wife JoAnn. It took four days to ride 330 miles to reach Mackinaw City.

They cycled US-27, stayed in state parks, and endured the infamous hill in East Jordan that took them a half-day to climb. They made it all the way to Mackinaw City for the Bridge Walk and the rest as they say is history. DALMAC has become an iconic ride that attracts over 1,500 riders each year, many of whom are excited about the option to ride across the Mackinac Bridge.

The following year, a press release announced Allen's intentions to do it again, and this time more than 70 riders showed up at the State Capital to make the trek to the Mackinac Bridge.



Photo by Sherry Mitchell

Randy Novak with Dick Allen during the 2015 DALMAC

The event soon became too large for the visionary Allen to handle.

In 1973 the Tri-County Bicycle Association and the Little Traverse Travelers helped organize the ride. Before the 1975 event, TCBA leaders met with Allen to announce the group's intention to take over the event, leaving Allen to serve as the face and visionary of the group.

In an astute move, Allen agreed to TCBA's request with the stipulation that half of funds raised be set aside to benefit bicycling in Michigan, a unique idea and one of the first foundations of its kind in the country.

DALMAC attracts over 1,500 riders each year with the option to ride across the Mackinac Bridge.



Photo by Leta O'Connor

In the early years the DALMAC Fund paid to publish a pamphlet and bike poster listing bike tours in Michigan and was instrumental in funding the League of Michigan Bicyclists, the Michigan Trails Alliance (that later became the Rails to Trails Conservancy of Michigan), the Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance and groups such as the West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition.

"It's really unique for anybody to have an event that's popular and profitable like DALMAC," said Darryl Burris, a board member of TCBA since the 1980s who has participated in DALMAC 31 years in a row. He noted the DALMAC Fund has given out over \$1 million while keeping the cost of the multi-day ride options affordable. He said participants enjoy a well-supported ride thanks to volunteers who love cycling.

Although it varies from year to year, the DALMAC Fund awards about \$75,000 in grants each year, according to Steve Leiby, DALMAC Fund committee chair and active TCBA member who served on the original DALMAC Committee beginning in 1973 and served as DALMAC director in 1979. Grants typically range from \$1,000 to \$15,000 and fund everything from wayfinding signs, youth bikes and equipment to bicycle parking, trail extensions, educational materials, bikes for Special Olympians, bike racks, tools, bridges for non-motorized trails, bicycle computers, bicycle giveaway programs, trail surfacing, police bicycles, trail grading and paving, helmets, and trail markers.

"Every June we have all the applicants selected to receive funds come to a bike club meeting and talk about what they're going to do with the money," Leiby said. "Sometimes we will literally hand them a check on the spot."

"The advantage of the DALMAC Fund is that you don't need a consultant to tell you how to apply. You don't need a lot

of reporting for fiduciary requirements," said Allen, who reviews and approves the grant applications.

The DALMAC Fund has played a broad role in trail development in Michigan because organizations can often receive the last \$5,000 to \$7,000 needed to meet match requirements. Authorization letters are sent for selected projects with payment given upon successful fundraising.

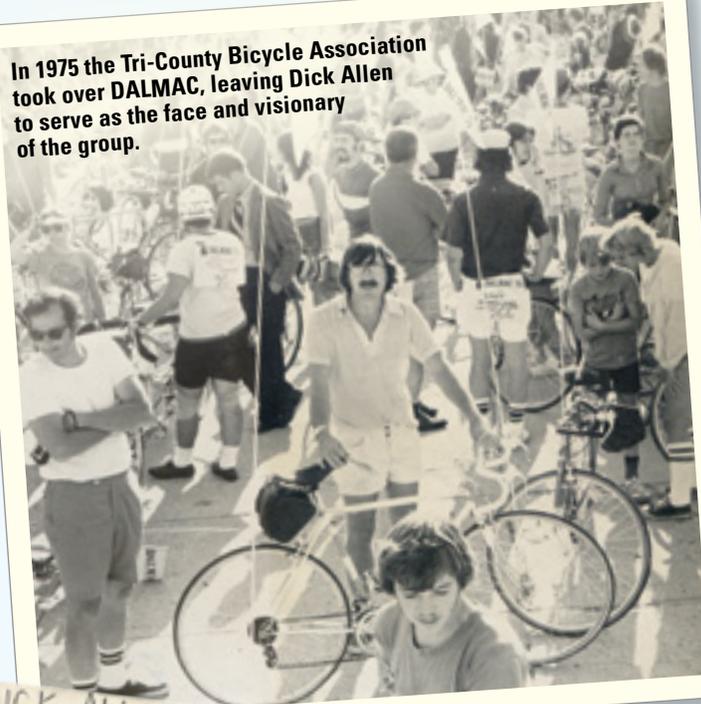
"We do a lot of grants to rail trails and city trails," Burris said.

If you would like to participate in the 2016 DALMAC ride during the Labor Day weekend, visit their website (DALMAC.org) for more information.

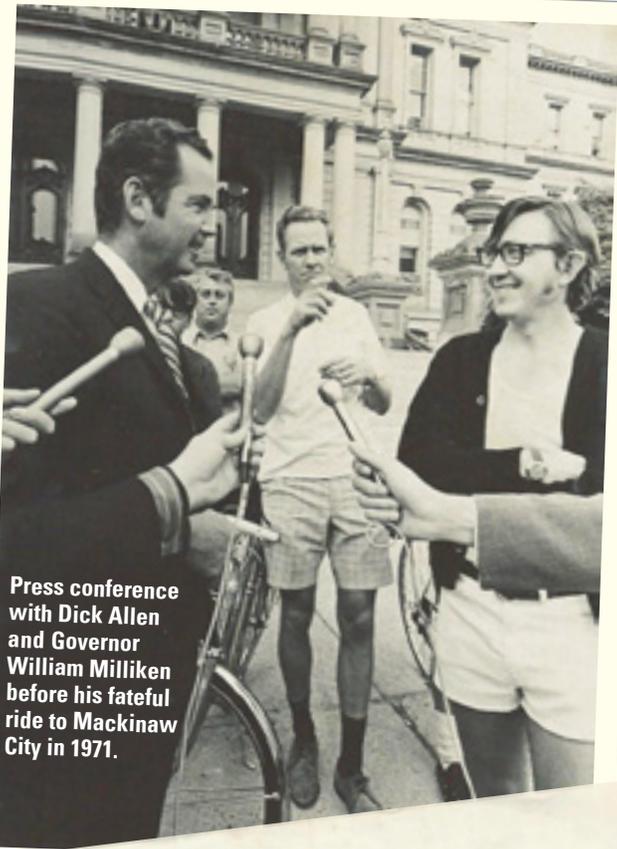
2015 Grants Awarded by the DALMAC Fund

- Back Alley Bikes, Detroit – expansion of Youth Ride bicycle program. \$1,000
- Fred Meijer Clinton Ionia Shiawassee Trail – bicycle parking, park benches and trash cans. \$4,000
- City of St. Johns – wayfinding signs for Fred Meijer CIS Trail. \$3,000
- Detroit Eastside Community Collaborative – Earn-A-Bike program with Back Alley Bikes. \$3,000
- Fitness Council of Jackson – Armory Bicycle Program. \$3,000
- Jordan Lake Trail, Lake Odessa – support of Phase 1. \$5,000
- Kalamazoo Open Roads Fixapalooza bicycle program. \$1,000
- Kalamazoo County Parks Foundation trail extension from 35th Street to Fort Custer Recreation Area. \$10,000
- Lansing Bike Coop remodeling of new facility. \$3,000
- Lyon Township Higgins Lake, bicycle parking project in township parks. \$1,000
- Monroe County 4H – 4H Ride to the 4H conference at Michigan State University. \$2,500
- Spoonville Bicycle Trail construction project, Ottawa County. \$7,500
- PEAC (Program to Educate All Cyclists), Ypsilanti bicycle education for persons with disabilities. \$3,000
- River Valley Rail Trail construction project connecting Saranac to Greenville. \$10,000
- Central Michigan University Special Olympics bicycle athletes program. \$3,000
- TART Trails, Traverse City, trail extension from Bunker Hill to M-72 connecting to Lautner Road – \$10,000
- West Michigan Trails & Greenways Coalition, construction of pedestrian tunnel under Lake Michigan Drive connecting sections of the Fred Meijer Standale Trail. \$10,000

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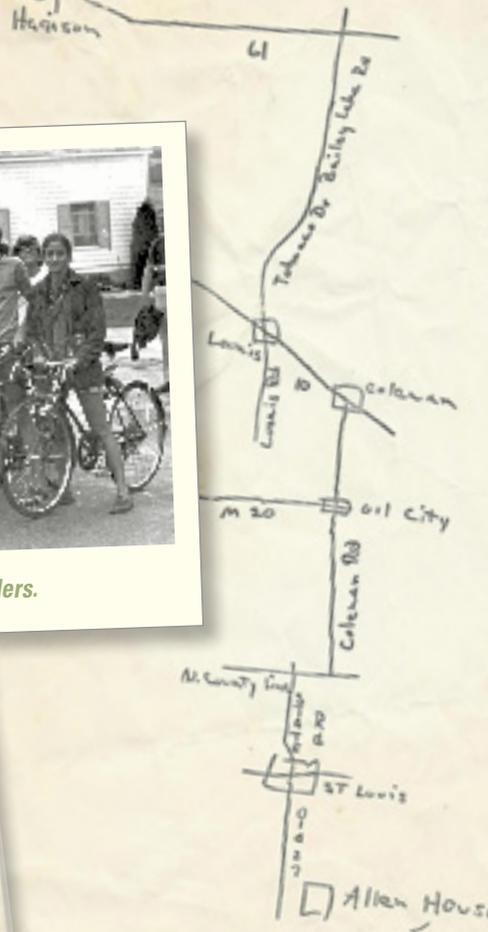


Press conference with Dick Allen and Governor William Milliken before his fateful ride to Mackinaw City in 1971.



DICK ALLEN MACKINAC BICYCLE RALLY

2nd Day Map
 20 camp - State Pk
 Harrison



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 LANSING MICHIGAN

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Dick and the original 11 Riders.

To prove that bicycles are transportation, Dick Allen and a small group of friends loaded camping gear in a camper driven by his wife JoAnn. It took four days to ride 330 miles to reach Mackinaw City.