

# It Doesn't Get Any Better

by John Ruggiero

It started three years ago for me. Archie Stewart called me and ask if I would be the announcer for a small festival in New Hampshire. I agreed and found myself at the Crotched Mountain School in Greenfield, New Hampshire. I met Deb DeCicco, the event organizer. They did not want me to bring my sound system because they said they had one. It wasn't pretty. They had a single self-powered speaker that was good enough to fill a small room, not an outdoor festival. Then I saw why I was there. The school is a place that specializes in helping profoundly handicapped young people. I saw teens in motorized wheelchairs, young people who were blind, deaf, paraplegic, quadriplegic, and profoundly challenged. Most had an attendant who helped them through their day.

A few members of Kite Over New England responded to the postings Archie and I had made and came to fly with the clients. "Hardware" Hank Manseau came out to fly. Hank is one of the founding members of KONE and highly respected among us. He is getting on in years so he chooses the events he goes to carefully. Hank knew this would be special.

The evening before, Archie had led a kite workshop. He had poured paint on a tarp and had the clients roll their chairs through the paint and onto the sails. There were kites flying from the wheelchairs with tire tracks all over. The smiles on the faces told me all I needed to know. I volunteered to bring my sound system for the next time they wanted to do something like this.

My wife and I celebrated our 25th anniversary with the purchase of a Travel Trailer. I had camped as a child with my family for many years in Greenfield State Park, just 2 miles from the school. I made reservations for a site. We packed up the sound system and headed to Greenfield.

The kids were ready for us this time. We were greeted with smiles and anticipation. A drummer, Mike Winfield returned and held drumming circles, this time with the sound reinforcement he needed to reach everyone. Deb was a little more relaxed. I played music from my collection and made the announcements that told people what to expect and where. Deb grew even more relaxed and even flew a kite. The festival went very well. The image that I took home was of a teen aged boy, deaf, blind and immobile in a powered chair with his hand on my subwoofer and an ear to ear grin on his face. The Chairman of the Board of the school came by to thank us one by one. The Principal told me how much better the sound system made the event. Long before these expressions of appreciation, I knew that there was nothing that could keep me away from volunteering for this place in any way they would have me.

The next time we got to go to Crotched Mountain was this past October. The festival was the biggest yet. They fed over five hundred people and I didn't have enough room to even fly my stack of ten Rev 2s. Somebody had asked if we could use the gym this time. I brought my indoor sound system for it. The Adaptive Athletics Teacher saw me flying an Indoor Rev and couldn't believe his eyes. While my wife kept the outdoor sound system running, I flew for the people who wandered by the gym. Hours later, I finally had a chance to get outside. After I ate some lunch prepared, as usual, by the local Masons I made a few announcements. Deb was downright happy. Things were going great. The clients were having a ball. There were kites being flown by the clients and their families. The members of Kites Over New England. Hank was there and putting his kites in the air. Archie was so busy helping that he didn't get to put a kite in the air until the end of the day. There were smiles on faces that don't get to do that a lot. The staff, the clients and especially the members of KONE had a wonderful time.

Archie, my wife Lisa and I went out to dinner with Deb after the festival. I mentioned to Deb that New England is home to some of the best indoor fliers in the world. How would she feel about hosting an indoor competition at the school? She thought about it for a second and agreed. The school is always looking for something unusual for the clients and it doesn't get much more unusual than indoor flying. Deb, Scott Weider and I worked out all the arrangements to have an officially sanctioned AKA indoor competition. Mel Hickman made sure the insurance went through. I signed all the contracts (I think there was a clause involving my first born child in there somewhere) and Deb put it all together at the school.

Scott was the event organizer and Chief Judge. Steve Santos, Tim and Sue Boyle were our judges with Sue as the Head Judge. We had an amazingly good lunch at the school cafeteria followed by an hour of warm up. Then Scott and Steve did wonderful demos. The competition began. The computer picked me to fly first, and Gary Quinton ran the sound system while I flew. We saw amazing performances by Doug Coates, Archie Stewart, Gary Quinton and Paul Berard. The judges had a tough job. The results were Archie, Paulie and myself taking the top three.

Then we opened up the floor for everyone to fly. Paul Berard's indoor Eddy kites made it easy for the clients to fly while the competitors pushed their chairs. I was helping a guy with his powered chair. I didn't know how to keep the speed up during turns with the chair. His smile would fade as the kite dropped when we slowed down. Then the smile would come back as the kite rose into the air again. When it was time to give someone else a turn, the guy's attendant was near speechless. It seems he hadn't used his facial muscles in a while. I pushed chairs and got to see more smiles. Deb had the biggest grin of them all. By the end of the evening when Scott was passing out the awards, we realized that every single person in that room from the most skilled to the most challenged was now a "Flier". It doesn't get any better than that.