

Making it to the top no small feat for two

By Tom Renner

It is hard to imagine anything grander than viewing Lake Michigan from atop one of the state's spectacular sand dunes. It is frequently a physical challenge to "make it to the top".

That's no longer true at the recently opened Porter Legacy Dunes in South Haven Township.

Thanks to the construction of an amazing ADA compliant ramp from the base of the dunes to its top – a height of 120 feet.

South Haven resident Dick Brunvand proved it. The 88-year-old Brunvand's mobility is limited. He has arthrogryposis, a rare birth defect that restricts the growth of legs and arms. He frequently uses an electric-powered wheelchair although he can often be seen pedaling around South Haven on his three-wheeled bike.

Dick decided the opportunity to get to the top of the Porter Dunes was something to be shared so he invited 93-year-old friend Bob Copping to join him. Copping is a very active community advocate who founded the civic organization SHOUT.



Located just south of Pilgrim Haven Natural Area, the Porter Legacy Dunes protects a rare forested back dune ecosystem while creating new opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to experience southwest Michigan's lakeshore. It opened in June.

Dick was confident they would be successful. He served on the Pilgrim Haven planning committee when the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) decided to tackle that project made possible by a donation of land from Suzanne Upjohn

DeLano Parish – former World War II Women's Airforce Service Pilot (WASP) and co-founder of the Air Zoo in Portage. He was involved in the early discussion of the possibility of establishing a dune accessible trail.

"Led by SWMLC Conservation & Stewardship Director Mitch Lettow, engineers, and contractors, the workers were meticulous in their planning and execution," said Brunvand. "This magnificent 1,100-foot-long ramp, if you will, snakes upward to the top of the dunes without disrupting its natural

beauty. It's unbelievable! Our journey to the top was a dream come true and I got to do it with my friend Bob."

All along the way the friends Dick and Bob delighted in telling others making the trek about their wonderful hometown.

The 10-minute "trek" ended atop the dunes where from a newly constructed viewing deck Dick and Bob could take-in the lake and the shoreline of the nearby Pilgrim Haven beach.

Moments for reflection concluded the adventure of these two friends.

