

FULL SAIL AHEAD

Stories celebrating triumph, independence, and collaboration

CLEARING PATHS TO FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

Surrounded by the Tongass National Forest, like much of Southeast, **Sitka is a place where forested mountains meet the ocean.** Its trails wind through lush rainforest, across muskeg and streams, and along rocky beaches, connecting residents and visitors to campsites, cabins, picnic areas, and some of Southeast Alaska's most beautiful outdoor spaces. **Keeping these places safe and welcoming requires constant care,** especially in Sitka's wet climate, where vegetation grows quickly and moss, mud, and debris can easily overtake trails and boardwalks.

This summer, students in SAIL's Summer Work Program became Sitka Trail Guardians, gaining paid, hands-on employment experience while caring for important community spaces. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the City of Sitka, and Alaska State Parks, the crew worked at Beaver Lake, Starrigavan, Halibut Point Recreation Area, Thimbleberry Lake, Goddard Hot Springs, Tom Young Memorial Cabin, and the cemetery near the Gavin Hill trailhead.



Pictured: Participants in **SAIL's 2026 Sitka Summer Work Program**

They dug ditches, spread gravel, cleared campsites and picnic areas, removed thick salmonberry bushes, cleaned bridges, repaired boardwalks, scrubbed the hot spring tubs, and removed garbage from a public-use cabin. They worked through rain, wind, mosquitoes, sore muscles—and even the occasional sunny afternoon. **The results can be seen throughout Sitka, but the program's most important impact reaches far beyond the trails.**

The Summer Work Program gives students with disabilities an essential bridge into the workforce. It provides more than a summer job: students have the opportunity to practice communicating with supervisors, following schedules, solving problems, adapting when plans change, and working as part of a team. These are skills best learned through meaningful, real-world experience.

Students also explored careers that matched their interests and strengths, researched the education or training those careers require, and created résumés they can use as they pursue future opportunities. By the end of the summer, the students had not only completed an impressive list of projects—they had also discovered what they were capable of accomplishing.

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Pictured: **Paul Escano**, a participant in SAIL's Ketchikan Summer Work Program

"I hope this experience has helped you realize that work is not just about a timecard and a paycheck," Summer Work Coordinator Lara shared with the students. "It requires leadership skills, pride, and confidence."

SAIL's Summer Work Program creates a supportive place for students to develop those qualities while contributing meaningful work to their community. Each completed project became evidence that they could persevere through challenges, learn new skills, depend on one another, and take pride in a job well done.

This summer, SAIL's Summer Work Program also created meaningful employment experiences for students in Juneau, Haines, Gustavus and Ketchikan. Across all communities, students gained practical skills, built confidence, and contributed valuable work close to home. Through SAIL young people throughout Southeast Alaska can access the experience, guidance, and encouragement they need to recognize their strengths and prepare for future employment.



S A V E T H E D A T E

GALA Dinner
AND Auction

UNMASKING DISABILITY

Celebrating Personal Independence

SATURDAY
OCT. 17

CENTENNIAL
HALL

6:00PM
9:00PM

Join us at the Auction! Learn more at:
sailinc.org/auction. Now accepting auction items,
desserts, and volunteers



"A WHOLE NEW KEVIN" – A VETERAN'S STORY



Pictured: Kevin Dugan with Sarah Hoerth, SAIL VOICE Specialist

On a good Juneau day, Kevin Dugan can be found riding his new recumbent bike through his neighborhood, often with his seven-year-old grandson beside him. For Kevin, each ride represents more than fresh air and exercise. It is a chance to spend time with someone he loves, and to regain a sense of freedom.

Kevin is a retired Coast Guard veteran who later worked for the City and Borough of Juneau's Docks and Harbors Department. **Before experiencing a stroke in 2024, he led an active life.** The stroke affected his mobility and communication, changing many parts of daily life for Kevin and his family.

As Kevin began the long process of recovery, he and his wife, Janice, connected with SAIL's VOICE program. VOICE gives veterans greater choice and control over the support they receive at home, allowing them to decide who provides their care and how that support fits into their lives. For Kevin, it has meant receiving assistance from someone he knows and trusts while continuing to live at home, surrounded by his family and community.

With Janice by his side, Kevin has worked steadily through physical, occupational, and speech therapy. Progress has come through persistence and countless small steps, each one meaningful. **During a recent visit, Kevin proudly showed SAIL staff that he could hug Janice with both arms,** something he had not been able to do after his stroke. He has also made strides in communicating, greeting visitors, and participating more fully in family life.

But one goal kept pulling him forward: getting back on a bike.

Kevin first tried a recumbent bike through SAIL's adaptive recreation equipment. With supportive pedals and a stable, three-wheeled design, the bike offered a way for him to be active again. He quickly began dreaming of having one of his own—especially so he could ride alongside his grandson. **SAIL staff worked with Kevin and Janice to explore funding options and secure support for a bike suited to his needs.** When it finally arrived, Kevin could hardly wait to start putting on the miles.

The difference was immediate. Janice described seeing "a whole new Kevin"—more active, engaged, and excited about what he could do. Before long, he had ridden from his home to the Mendenhall Glacier and was regularly exploring the neighborhood with his grandson.

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VETERAN DIRECTED CARE

VETERAN-DIRECTED CARE or VOICE is a collaboration of the Alaska VA and Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL)

YOU ARE IN CHARGE!

You or your designated representative will direct the support and services you need.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs



The bike is an important part of Kevin's story, but **his journey is about much more than a piece of equipment. It is about having choices, setting personal goals, and receiving the right support to pursue them.** VOICE recognizes that veterans and their families understand their own needs best. Instead of fitting Kevin's life around a predetermined system of care, the program helps shape support around the life he wants to lead.

Kevin continues to work toward new milestones, with his family cheering him on. Each hug, conversation, and bike ride reflects the determination he has brought to his recovery—and the independence he continues to reclaim.

Because of SAIL's supporters, veterans like Kevin have someone in their corner to help navigate services, find resources, and pursue the goals that matter most to them. Thank you for helping people throughout Southeast Alaska remain connected to their families, their communities, and the lives they choose.

HELP BUILD A PERMANENT HOME IN KETCHIKAN

DONATE 



SCAN WITH
A SMART
PHONE
CAMERA

SAIL is working to purchase and renovate our Ketchikan office, creating a permanent, accessible home and Independent Living Skills Training Center.

In Southeast Alaska, there are not many accessible spaces. This exciting project will give seniors and people with disabilities a place to practice everyday skills, explore adaptive tools, and build confidence to live independently. **We need your help to make this vision a reality!**

sailinc.org/donate