

Cycling from Canada to Palmerton

500-mile fund-raiser trip fights cancer

By Corrine Durdock
East Penn Press staff

On Aug. 9, at 6:30 a.m., 40 cyclists poised on their bikes in Montreal, Canada, ready to begin their 500-mile trek. It was cold—in the high 40s—colder than any of the riders expected after leaving Pennsylvania in the midst of a heat spell the day before. The group, participants in the Pennsylvania Perimeter Ride Against Cancer IX, had assembled at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Palmerton, to attend a church service and eat breakfast before boarding vans for the trip to Montreal, arriving at their destination around 8 p.m.

Co-organizers and founders, elementary school teacher Bob Freed, 42, of Allentown and Lutheran minister Paul Schoffstall, 48, of New Tripoli knew what was in store for the first-timers since the two men had completed eight previous rides.

Ahead of them was their longest day of riding—112 miles to Saranac Lake, N.Y. Other overnight stops were in Old Forge, N.Y., Utica, N.Y., Oneonta, N.Y., and Carbondale. The six-day ride finished at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Palmerton, where Schoffstall presides as pastor.

Schoffstall said he participates because the ride is "a gathering of friends who are passionate about their lives; fighting cancer is a fundamental part of life; the ride gives more life than it takes away."

Freed, an elementary teacher in the Kutztown School District, said "the original Perimeter Ride was born after the death of my father who had been battling cancer. On the day of the completion of our first ride, I realized I wanted the dream of helping others to live on."

The riders were supported during the event by three vans, one in front, one in the middle and one at the end of the pack. The vans carry tools, wheels, spokes and miscellaneous supplies to help keep the bikes and riders on the road.

According to John Petrilak, ACS staff, the riders use staggered starts, fastest riders starting later, in order for the group to finish at about the same time. There were also three husband-and-wife tandem bike teams that tend to be a little slower and have to start each day earlier. The object is to finish together around 4 or 6 p.m., eat dinner in a local restaurant and bed down in a host church. This year, one night's stay was spent in a hotel. The congregations prepare a breakfast to help the riders start the day.

This year for the first time, two massage therapists, John Reilly of Lancaster and Judith Moyer of Pottstown, were part of the support team whose services were a welcome addition, said Petrilak. In addition, 10-12 staff members participated as part of the support team. Freed's wife, Kathy, coordinates the support crew.

East Penn area riders who participated were George R. Mack III, a language arts teacher of Emmaus, participating for the third time. He said he dedicated his ride to an eighth grade student at Eyer Middle School. Completing his fifth ride was Eric Loch, an Emmaus jeweler, who said he considers himself "very lucky to be able to do this" and because he knows "there are young children who can only dream of bicycle riding and may never get a chance to live a full life."

Denny Snyder of Macungie, riding for the second time, rode "to help anyone that can benefit from the money I raise." Rick Stauffer, an anesthesiologist from Emmaus, said he participated because of "the cause, the people, the exercise and the scenery." Ron Billman, on his first ride, decided to participate to take part in a good cause while sharing another tough bike trip with his buddies, Snyder, Myers and Mack. Ron Derr of Emmaus, riding in his fourth ride, said the best part of the ride is always "the welcome-home reception and seeing and hearing the children who receive the 'dreams.'"

Also participating were J. Douglas Myers of Wescosville and Pat Corpora of Center Valley, both



Jerry Horst of Emmaus



Rick Stauffer of Emmaus

East Penn Press photos by KATE STEPAN

for the third time, and Jerry Horst and Sharon Merkel, both from Emmaus.

Also participating from Allentown were Chuck and Doreen Canfield, Nate Freed, Bradford Gerhart, Karl Glassman, Stefan Goslawski, Bruce Gustin, Jack Helffrich, Michael Murrillo, Michael Recica and Paul Wessel.

Two riders came from as far away as California. The ages of the riders ranged from 17 to 61 years old.

Participants pledge to raise a minimum of \$1,000 for the event that is held every two years. To date, the 1999 riders have raised an unofficial total of \$77,000, said Petrilak, with more funds still expected.