

Local Rotary club logs miles, money on fundraising bike tour
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Mansfield Rotarian Jim DeSanto gets a hug from his daughter Sammi, age 10, after he rolled into North Lake Park with a group of fellow club members on a 300 mile pike ride to raise funds for Rotary charities. They came from Marion and are spending the night in Mansfield and head to Norwalk for the next stop Saturday. (Dave Polcyn/News Journal)

MANSFIELD — Northwestern Ohio Rotary Club members breezed into North Lake Park on bicycles Friday, on nearly the last leg of a 450-mile trip.

Despite sweltering temperatures, they were in good spirits.

In the sixth day of a weeklong bike tour, participants have already raised \$30,000 toward their goal.

“If we don’t reach \$50,000, we’ll be close,” predicted Ed Stewart, a Rotary Club member from Elyria.

Stewart helped found the annual summer fundraiser several years back, with help from other Rotary Club members from Elyria.

“Four of us were already cyclists. We saw that the international Rotary convention would be in Chicago. That was close enough that we thought we should ride there. Then, some of us said we should raise money from the trip while we were at it,” he said.

Sixty-seven clubs around Rotary District 660 (running from Mansfield to Ohio’s northwest border) are asked to contribute to Medical Equipment and Supplies Abroad.

MESA is a 15-year-old nonprofit project that involves collecting used medical and dental equipment, and storing it in a Findlay warehouse until it can be shipped to Third World countries.

Over the years, X-ray equipment, dental chairs and other items have been sent to health clinics in Belize, Nigeria, Romania and other struggling countries.

While it’s sometimes outmoded by U.S. standards, the equipment is “a heck of a lot better than what they have now,” said Dave Daugherty, a Mansfield Rotary Club member and district governor for Rotary District 6600.

Over the years, MedCentral/Mansfield Hospital has donated equipment to MESA. Mansfield dentist Winfield Meek recently gave the group a couple of dental chairs, Daugherty said.

Rotary members started their trip in Fremont, traveling through Toledo, Defiance and St. Mary. They stopped in Marion Thursday and Mansfield Friday, with plans to return to Fremont today.

A support team followed, using a bus and panel truck to carry water, snacks and luggage.

District 6600 clubs met the bikers with checks for MESA that ranged from a couple of hundred dollars to \$10,000 given by Findlay Rotarians.

In each town, host families put cyclists up for the night.

Sixteen cyclists biked the entire route.

Two area cyclists — Jim DeSanto of Mansfield and C. Reid Miller of Shelby — were among those logging all 450 miles. It was the first year DeSanto biked the entire trip.

“I did my first 100-mile day — my first century — which was quite a challenge,” he said.

DeSanto said while cycling has the reputation of being a sport for thin guys, he found completing a long-distance trip fulfilling.

“I did this to prove to myself that even the bigger guys can do these rides.”

Ophthalmologist Thomas Brumley of Findlay biked the entire route, too.

He opened an eye clinic in Zambia in 2001, and returned in May from a two-week stint there. Brumley said a nurse practitioner keeps the clinic open most of the year, but he tries to schedule a team of eye specialists in four times annually, for complex surgeries. The need in Zambia is great, he said.

“When we arrived, there were over 300 people waiting,” Brumley said. “So this MESA fundraiser means a lot to me.”

This Article was written by Linda Martz of the Mansfield News Journal