

Island Sports

Riders scale Newport bridge to raise funds for MS

By Adrienne Downing

While most of the island was still sleeping on Sunday morning, seven Jamestown bicyclists were taking a once in a lifetime ride across the Newport Pell Bridge.

The islanders joined 874 other cyclists from New England in the Fidelity MS 150 Bike Tour, a two-day, 150-mile ride around the Narragansett Bay to benefit the Rhode Island Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

The ride started Saturday morning at Cranston West High School. It then traveled north towards Provi-

dence before heading south through several east bay communities and ended at Salve Regina University on Saturday afternoon. The riders assembled in Newport at 6:45 a.m. on Sunday morning, traveled across the Newport and Jamestown bridges, passed through Washington and Kent counties and ended at Cranston West on Sunday afternoon. The first day of the ride was 85 miles and the Sunday portion was 65 miles.

"This ride is the single, largest fund-raising event for the Rhode Island chapter. Over \$300,000 will go directly to research," Emily Murphy,

race coordinator, said. "This year is the twentieth anniversary of the ride and we have a record number of riders."

The riders had different reasons for participating in the event, but each agreed it was an amazing ride.

Chris Brown, a first-time participant from Jamestown, was riding for his mother who has MS.

"It was a fun ride over the Newport bridge. You don't realize how high it is when you are traveling over it by car," Brown said.

Brown is a seasoned cyclist who trained four months for the race and he said the headwind on Saturday caused him more issues than climbing the steep rise on the Newport bridge.

He complimented the race coordination team for the way the whole race was staged.

"It was a great ride and they really treated us well. The way the ride was run was first class," he said.

Islander Lori Colasanto, also a first time rider, became involved with the event through a friend at St. Joseph's Hospital, where she works.

"My friend was a team captain and she was recruiting people to be on her team. I knew about the ride over the bridges and I thought this would be an amazing opportunity that I would never get again," she said.

The biggest surprise for Colasanto was the grade on the Jamestown bridge.

"The Newport bridge was a lot easier than I thought it would be, but there is a more drastic slope on the Jamestown bridge and it was much more difficult," she said.

Colasanto describes herself as someone who exercises, but definitely not a cyclist. Her motivation for the ride was the patients she encounters while working as an occupational therapist.

"A lot of my patients have MS and it kept me going knowing that



Marc Lennon of Jamestown is among the cyclists crossing the Newport Bridge on Sunday morning in support of the Fidelity MS 150 Tour.

Photo by Adrienne Downing

no matter what pain I was feeling, they go through a lot worse," she said.

Jamestown resident Marc Lennon, a four-time veteran of the ride, said he enjoyed it so much he "would do it again tomorrow."

He did not join the ride with a team, but said he enjoys finding riders along the route to converse with.

"There is definitely a mixed bag of riders, some are college students, some are serious riders, some are not. I just find someone who is going about the same pace and cadence I am and ride with them," he said.

Lennon said he was particularly impressed with this year's course because, unlike some previous rides, most of the course was in Rhode Island. He regularly takes training rides of over 40 miles on varying terrain, so he did not find the ride to be difficult.

He was the good Samaritan of the event, stopping to help with a rider who was injured in a collision on the Jamestown bridge.

Islander Steve Turilli is also a veteran of the ride, participating in his third event this year. He noted the extreme difference between this year's ride and last year.

"Last year we had torrential tropical rains. Before the ride even got started, there were two riders down that had to go to the hospital," he said.

As with the other riders, Turilli was awed by the ride over the Newport bridge, but he was also pleased to have a different view of places he has seen many times.

"It was very quiet on the bridge on Sunday morning. There were not

many cars and it was so clear I could see Point Judith," he said. "Everything looked so different from the bike. There were things I passed by that I just kept saying 'I never noticed that before'."

Turilli has done riding for charity before, including a triathlon in Florida for Team-in-Training in 2004.

"This event is different because they make you feel like you won the Tour de France. Every time we turned a corner or pulled into a rest stop someone was cheering for us," he said.

The purpose of the ride hit home with Turilli when he was riding behind a cyclist who was wearing a photo of his mother in bed with her two grandchildren.

"That is when it hits you. It isn't someone's name written on a card that they are riding for. It is a real person and that really touches you," he said.

One of the people cheering for Turilli and his fellow riders was event volunteer Terri Haywood. She is one of over 180 volunteers that helps with the ride every year, but she has a special reason for being there.

"I wear this Thank You hat because I have MS and I want to say thank you to everyone of these riders because they are helping me. I can't participate in the ride, but I can cheer them on and encourage them because they encourage me," she said.

For more information about the event or to volunteer to ride next year, visit <http://bikerir.nationalms-society.org>.

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