

# Ride Allegheny Cyclists Raise Funds for Operation Second Chance

BY SALLY ALT

Cyclists participating in the 320-mile Ride Allegheny showed their support for recovering veterans by raising funds for Operation Second Chance. In the beginning of October, 87 riders from 10 states and Washington, D.C., met in Pittsburgh to start a four-day bicycle trip that ended at Smokey Glen Farm in Gaithersburg. The cyclists raised more than \$380,000 for Operation Second Chance, a non-profit organization that helps wounded soldiers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Bethesda and facilities across the U.S.

Riders' efforts exceeded the fundraising goal of \$300,000 for the event. For Clark Wagner, Kentlands resident and founder of Ride Allegheny, surpassing that target is "really exhilarating," he said, adding that the donated funds will have a big impact on recovering veterans.

Wagner feels that the participants benefit from riding in the event. "Folks get to experience the ride of their life, (and) they also get to really support a great cause at the same time," he said. "People come from all walks of life, and they forget about their differences."

Ride Allegheny is the largest fundraising event for Operation Second Chance, which serves wounded, injured and ill veterans, said Cindy McGrew, who founded the Germantown-based organization in 2005 after she began visiting and caring for the wounded at Walter Reed and saw the great demand for her services.

McGrew, who participated as a cyclist in the ride, said that she most enjoyed the camaraderie with the other riders. "Everyone is so grateful for the men and women who put their (lives) on the line," she said.

Cyclists of all ages participated in Ride Allegheny. "We had the youngest rider ever this year," said Wagner.

Reese Plant, a 14-year-old from Ijamsville, rode in the race with his father, Tom.

About half of the cyclists rode in the Ride Allegheny event for the first time. Wagner said that he enjoys riding with "rookies," and added, "We love meeting new people on the ride and getting excited with them as they experience a lot of this for the first time."

Wagner founded Ride Allegheny in 2001 when he decided to go on a bicycling adventure from Pittsburgh to Gaithersburg with a group of neighborhood friends, including Walt Ellenberger and Dave Baseheart.

Ride Allegheny "keeps getting better year after year," said Baseheart, who trained for the event by going on 20-100 mile practice rides throughout the year.

When Baseheart experienced challenges during the ride, he said that he

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persevered by thinking about "our service men and women who serve for us overseas in a lot more challenging conditions. ... It motivates you."

"When you're finished, you feel like you really accomplished something," said Ellenberger. The bike ride is a "refreshing change" from his life in the city, he said.

Riders look forward to seeing old friends and stopping at their favorite restaurants

during the bicycle trip, said Ellenberger, who is happy that the Ride Allegheny event has grown since its inception.

Mark Shell, the chair for fundraising for Ride Allegheny, said that every rider is expected to raise at least \$1,000. "Everyone gives way beyond what we ask of them to help the families and the vets," he said. Each rider has his or her own fundraising Web page that he or she can use to email friends, families, and companies for donations, he said.

Darnestown resident Tim Sanders

said that he enjoyed seeing the fall colors during the ride, as well as the rivers and wildlife. Ride Allegheny features "some of the most beautiful scenery you'll see in the country," he said.

Sanders, who has participated in Ride Allegheny for three years, considers all of the cyclists in the event to be his friends. He said, "We're family."

For more information on both Ride Allegheny and Operation Second Chance, please visit their websites at [rideallegheny.org](http://rideallegheny.org) and [operationsecondchance.org](http://operationsecondchance.org).

