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Biking across the country for a cause

By Steve McClain Georgetown News-Graphic Jul 6, 2019

Parker and Tucker Phelps

From sea to shining sea is taking on new meaning for Tucker and Parker Phelps, WKU students from Frankfort.

Tucker and Parker, whose grandparents — Larry Pieratt and Anne Hillard and numerous other family members live in Scott County — are members of the Phi Gamma Delta (FIJI) fraternity and are biking across the country to raise money and awareness for Alzheimer's on its Bike4Alz tour.

“We started with our back tires in the Pacific Ocean in San Francisco and will finish with our front tires in the Atlantic at Virginia Beach,” said Tucker. “We'll travel 3,600 miles total.”

This is the seventh year the fraternity has had a team bike across the country. This week and next they are in Kentucky holding fundraisers in Bowling Green, Louisville, Paducah and Lexington among other places. On Monday, July 8 from 6-8 p.m., they will be at Goodfellas Pizzeria on Manchester Street in Lexington. There will be a silent auction, Bike4Alz gear for sale and proceeds from dinner will go towards their fundraising efforts. This year's team has raised around \$55,000-\$60,000 and about \$300,000 total from the seven years has been raised. Donations can also be made at www.bike4alz.org.

Both Tucker and Parker said they have made memories for life on this year's trip.

“I don't think we had this on our bucket list of things to do,” Tucker said. “But we were in a position to do something memorable like this and it has been worth it.”

“We’ll finish up around July 20,” Parker said. “Usually we would be working summer jobs but to bike across the country with 12 of our best friends has made this the best summer of our lives.”

Not to say bicycling across the country is an easy task. In fact, it has been quite a challenge.

“We hadn’t touched a bike in about 10 years,” Parker laughed when asked if they were regular cyclists. “We would try to get in 30 minutes to an hour of riding a day once we decided to do it, but it is hard to really train for something like this when you are college students.”

They ride about 68-70 miles for five hours a day on average, Parker said.

And weather has been a particular challenge for the riders this year after riding out to San Francisco to start the journey.

“You would think of California being warm, but it was cold. We’ve ridden in 35 degrees and snow, wearing layer upon layer, which is not your normal attire,” Tucker said. “In Nevada, we had a hailstorm come out of nowhere and we got pummeled pretty good. We had to pull off in the desert and wait for our trucks to get there. We’ve had rain and tornado warnings that have washed some days out. We try to make the miles up but it depends on our schedule.”

Riding in altitudes of 10,000 feet also tests them.



“It gets hard to breathe and you break out in coughing fits,” Parker said.

But when it gets challenging, that is when the mission they are on and the kindness they have seen powers them through.

“We have met some amazing people and churches who have opened their doors and taken us in. When they see 14 sweaty, hungry, grumpy college guys coming in, and they still welcome us with love and they tell you their stories and connections to Alzheimer’s, it helps,” Tucker said.

“We were in McDonalds and a man was talking to us and asked what we were doing and when we told him, he went and bought a \$100 gift card to help with our meals,” Parker said. “We have a couple of guys who like cigars and we went into a tobacco shop. It is kind of rare to see a bunch of college guys in there and we told him what we were doing, and the owner made a \$100 donation on the spot.”

And there are their own personal stories and dedications. Their great-grandmother passed away from Alzheimer’s and their grandmother has pre-dementia. As Tucker pointed out, almost everyone knows someone who has suffered from the disease.

“People can go on the website and ask us to dedicate a day in honor or memory of someone they know who suffered from Alzheimer’s. We get those names and record a video designating that day in honor of them and post them to social media,” Parker said. “When the riding gets tough and you are going up a long hill, it is those stories and videos that we think about to get through.”

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