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Home / News

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Bike4Alz riders gear up for Alzheimer's research fundraiser

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Ethan Brown (from left) of Columbia, Conrad Jaconette of Dry Ridge, Alex Houlton of Louisville and Logan Carroll of Louisville ride Thursday into Bowling Green on Russellville Road during their trip across the country for the Bike4Alz organization. **For more coverage and video of the Bike4Alz arrival, visit bgdailynews.com.**

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Erik Roepke, a rising Western Kentucky University junior, has noticed a troubling trend this summer during a 3,600-mile bicycle journey across the U.S. to raise money for Alzheimer's research.

"(It) seems like everywhere we go ... we meet someone who has been affected by Alzheimer's disease," he said. "It kind of makes it so much more real."

Roepke, a Bowling Green native, is one of 11 WKU students bicycling from San Francisco to Virginia Beach, Va., during this year's Bike4Alz campaign.

On Monday, the team was riding to Kentucky for a tour of fundraising events, including one this week in Bowling Green. The event from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday at the SOKY Marketplace will include live music, food trucks and a silent auction. Admission is \$5.

Founded by WKU students in 2010, Bike4Alz has raised nearly \$250,000 for Alzheimer's research, according to a news release.

Along with Roepke, this year's riders are Alex Stackhouse, Jake Edmunds, Noah Rudloff, Seth Chaney and Wil Scott, all of Bowling Green; Ethan Hunt of Franklin; Griffin Beckner of Murfreesboro, Tenn.; Jacob Karaglanis of Goshen; Matthew Crawford of Somerset and Jeremy Latham of Paducah. The team's drivers are Griffin Heltsley and J.B. Carter, both of Bowling Green, according to a news release.

On Monday, the riders were headed to Paducah for a scheduled event. After stopping in Bowling Green later this week, the group will head to events in Louisville and Lexington before starting the last leg of its ride in Virginia.

Their journey has taken them across the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains ranges, through deserts and farmland, Roepke said. Riders average 67 miles a day and traveled as far as 120 miles in one day, he said.

"(The) closer we got to home the more excited we got," he said.

Several of the participants have had family members who've been affected by the disease.



Alzheimer's is the sixth-leading cause of death in the U.S. and more than 5 million Americans live with it. There is no known cure.

Roepke said hearing stories from victims across the country has spurred the group to keep going even on difficult days.

Noah Rudloff, a junior, is among the riders personally affected by Alzheimer's disease. Rudloff has watched his longtime girlfriend's grandmother, Elaine, struggle with Alzheimer's disease, he previously told the Daily News.

After that experience, Rudloff understood why people say the disease is like losing a loved one twice.

"You lose someone mentally and then you lose someone physically," he said.

– To donate to the group, visit www.bike4alz.org.

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