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WKU students begin cross-country journey for Alzheimer's awareness

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com May 18, 2018



WKU's Phi Gamma Delta fraternity is setting off on a 3,600-mile bicycle journey across the country to raise money for Alzheimer's research this summer.

WKU

When Western Kentucky University junior Noah Rudloff watched his long-time girlfriend's grandmother, Elaine, struggle with Alzheimer's disease, he came to understand why people say the disease is like losing a loved one twice.

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

Now, Rudloff is embarking on a 3,600-mile bicycle journey across the U.S. to raise money and awareness for Alzheimer's research. He's joined by 10 other Phi Gamma Delta fraternity brothers riding for the nonprofit Bike4Alz, which was founded by students in 2010 to honor a late member's grandfather.

"Our first goal is to raise as much money as we can," said Erik Roepke, a WKU junior. "The ultimate goal of this is to end Alzheimer's disease."

Previous teams have biked more than 13,000 miles and raised nearly \$250,000 for research, according to a news release. This year's group plans to raise \$50,000 before their journey from San Francisco to Virginia Beach, Va., is complete. They will make stops in Paducah, Bowling Green, Elizabethtown, Louisville and Lexington in early July.

Rudloff and Roepke are joined by Alex Stackhouse, Jake Edmunds, Seth Chaney, Will Scott, Ethan Hunt, Griffin Beckner, Jacob Karaglanis, Matthew Crawford and Jeremy Latham. The group's drivers are Griffin Heltsley and J.B. Carter.

On Thursday, the group was just outside San Francisco near the University of California, Berkeley, doing a practice run. The group doesn't expect to finish its journey before July 23.

"It's an eye-opening experience, and I know it will be," said Roepke, referring to what he's heard from previous riders.

Those who've seen Alzheimer's affect a family member or friend can dedicate a riding day on the group's website at www.bike4alz.org, where donations may also be made. The team makes a video each day to talk about the person and how the disease touched them.

"That person was someone's hero or their wife or husband or mom or dad," Roepke said.



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.

During the group's journey, riders will work with the Alzheimer's Association to coordinate fundraising events. Their trip will also allow them to visit nursing homes across the country and meet people with the disease.

Roepke said the group plans to travel an average of 66 miles per day. The group's longest ride in a given day will be in Colorado, with a goal of 120 miles, he said.

"There's some long days ahead of us for sure, and I think we're all well aware of that," he said.

But the group is spurred on by its hope to combat a brutal disease.

"I think we're all excited for this ride," he said.



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