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Bike4Alz team makes fundraising stop in E'town

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Bike4Alz team members JT Stoll, left, and Jordan Hitz, made a stop Sunday evening at the Original Impellizzeri's Pizza in Elizabethtown to raise money for the Alzheimer's Association. The team has been biking across the country since May and expects to complete their journey later this month. Founded in 2010, the group is made up of members of Western Kentucky University's Phi Gamma Delta, or Fiji, fraternity.

Since May, members of Western Kentucky University's Phi Gamma Delta, or Fiji, fraternity have been bicycling throughout the country to raise money for the Alzheimer's Association. The group, known as Bike4Alz, made a stop Sunday evening at the Original Impellizzeri's Pizza in Elizabethtown to raise money and awareness for their cause.

On May 18, the team drove from Bowling Green to San Francisco to begin their bicycle journey. Four days later, they placed their back tires on the shore of the Pacific Ocean and took off on a ride set to ultimately end in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The ride is approximately 3,600 miles long and spans 13 states.

The team is made up of a total of 14 members, including 12 bicyclists and two drivers. They expect to complete their journey July 28.

"We expect to see a lot of our families and friends and to jump right into the ocean with our bikes," bicyclist JT Stoll said of the ultimate end to their ride.

Throughout their journey so far, Stoll said some of the most difficult terrains to bike included the Sierra Nevada mountain range in California and the Katy Trail in Missouri, which is the longest recreational rail trail in the country.

"We popped a lot of tubes on the bike, and it's a hassle, that's for sure," Stoll said of the Katy Trail.

Bicyclist Jordan Hitz said one of the highlights so far was biking down the Rocky Mountains.

"That was when it rained for the first time on our trip and at that point, we were just excited," he said.

Throughout their travels, the team has stopped at various businesses to hold fundraisers, selling merchandise and making locals aware of their mission. All proceeds from merchandise sales benefit the Alzheimer's Association.

The team has held fundraisers in cities such as San Francisco, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, Denver and St. Louis. In Kentucky, fundraising stops include Elizabethtown, Bowling Green, Louisville, Lexington and Somerset.

According to Hitz, the team primarily has slept in churches throughout the ride. He said Bike4Alz has made several connections over the years with churches to secure lodging.

Bike4Alz originally was founded in 2010 by former Phi Gamma Delta member Tyler Jury. During the team's Sunday appearance in Elizabethtown, leather merchandise produced by Clayton & Crume, a Louisville-based business co-founded by Jury, was available for purchase.

The ride was canceled in 2020 because of COVID-19. However, Phi Gamma Delta still was able to raise money for the Alzheimer's Association.

For this year's monetary goal, the group hopes to raise \$100,000. Sutton said the team had raised approximately \$40,000 upon arrival in Kentucky and hopes to double that amount by the time they complete fundraising efforts in the state.

In addition to raising money through merchandise sales Sunday evening, the Bike4Alz team also received 10 percent of sales at Impellizzeri's during a portion of the evening, according to restaurant manager Robin Monroe.

Monroe said the restaurant previously hosted a Bike4Alz fundraiser in 2019. As someone who previously worked in the medical field, she has some first-hand experience on the effects of Alzheimer's on patients and said some Impellizzeri's employees have dealt with Alzheimer's diagnosis in their family.

"It's just something we care about," she said.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than five million Americans are living with the disease, and it is the sixth-leading cause of death in the U.S., killing more people than breast and prostate cancer combined.

Stoll said about half of this year's Bike4Alz team members have or had family members with Alzheimer's.

"I don't have a personal connection myself, but I want to give back and to help others and spread awareness of how awful this disease is," he said.

To donate directly to the Bike4Alz team, go to bike4alz.org/support-us.

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