

A spin with PEP'S PEDDLERS



Pep's Peddlers is a fun-loving group of cyclists who raise big money for multiple sclerosis by biking the Cape Cod Getaway, this year June 27-28, from Boston to Provincetown. The group gets together throughout the year for training, fundraising and socializing. The group's namesake, John "Pep" Pipitone of Reading, front, center, is surrounded by members of his growing cycling team.



The group's namesake, John "Pep" Pipitone, center, of Reading, jams with captains John Douglass, left, of Reading and Rick Ferullo of Chelmsford at John Douglass' home.

Cycling team is on the road to raising \$1 million for multiple sclerosis by 2018. It's a lot of work, but this group has a lot of fun doing it.

By TERRY DATE • Photos by CARL RUSSO

They are a rolling wheel of riders on a quest to cure multiple sclerosis along the Cape Cod Getaway bike trip.

At the center of the Reading cycling team is Pep, John "Pep" Pipitone of Reading, 52, for whom the team, Pep's Peddlers, is named.

Pushing out from the center are the members, among them two key spokes in the wheel, co-captains Rick Ferullo of Chelmsford and John Douglass of Reading.

This late afternoon the three friends talk all things Pep's over beer and nachos at Portland Pie Co. in downtown Reading.

HELP PEP'S TEAM

To donate to, contact, join or learn more about Pep's Peddlers visit pepspeddlers.com.

The beginning

The team starts with its hub, Pep, a dad with two kids, and whose No. 1 supporter is his wife, Camille.

Pep was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 14 years ago after feeling numbness, tingling and fatigue in his body. He had just finished moving furniture and such, and figured he had a pinched nerve.

Instead, a medical imaging device

revealed a lesion on his spinal column and that he had – and still has – MS. His father's father died from the disease, for which there is no cure.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease of the central nervous system, which disrupts the flow of information in the brain and between the brain and body. In many cases it is disabling, according to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

The disease may be held in check with medication. Pep gave himself injections for the first eight or nine years and the symptoms went away. He has had no setback since.

There came a time, around 2005, when Pep wanted to challenge himself, physically.

He did the 60-mile MS Vineyard ride. It was a warm day and he was nervous. The next few years he did it with his children and a few friends before deciding on a new challenge.

That challenge became the Cape Cod Getaway, a 150-mile ride from Boston to Provincetown.

The team

Pep and Ferullo have been friends since high school; Douglass, Ferullo and Pep have been friends since the Peddlers team came together. Pep and Douglass, of Douglass, Edgerley, & Bessom Funeral Home in Reading, met in 2006 at a Boston Bruins game.

Other friends of Pep have joined the Peddlers; some of them taking the challenge after years without physical activity, basically bouncing from the couch to the bike ride.

Ferullo says they tell them, "If Pep can do it ..." (you can do it).

Ribbing each other and good humor is a staple of the Peddlers.

The team has grown from a few friends raising a small amount of money in 2007, to registering 79 people – with 62 riders – and raising \$133,512 in 2014. The Peddlers' name has a double meaning, referring to



Remo Turchi, Pep and Rick Ferullo enter Provincetown on one of their Cape Cod Getaways.

the pedaling, they do but also to the peddling, their money-raising efforts for a cure.

"We have a small circle here that is getting bigger all the time," Ferullo said.

Pep says it makes him feel good to know that not just friends, but those with no connection to MS have joined the group.

Members outside Reading and Chelmsford include those from Cape Cod, central Massachusetts, Connecticut and Canada.

"We're international," Douglass quipped.

The Peddlers number about 70 members. Six of them have multiple sclerosis.

The ride

On Saturday, June 27, Pep and his teammates will be some of the first riders to hear their team's name boom over the sound system at UMass Boston.

They'll gather for a picture, hear the National Anthem and soak in the applause – maybe cheer for themselves.

After all, they have raised more than \$520,000 in seven years – and have their sights set on \$1 million by 2018.

Arched over their bikes, they'll pump their legs and roll from the starting line like a great long wagon train of wheels, joined in a common cause.

This is a trip to find the cause of multiple sclerosis and improve the lives of those living with the disease.

It's also a trip to bring the team closer.

With 2,000 riders the pace starts off pretty slow. Pep's crew remains a tight pack, talking and kidding, he says.

After the first water stop at the 20-mile mark, the riders break into groups according to their riding speed.

Regardless of their group, Pep's Peddlers will sport fake tattoos. Three or four years ago, they were the first team to sport them, and started a trend.

They'll wear their team uniforms. (Later, on the post-race boat ride, they will wear their signature T-shirts bearing the slogan:

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BEST OF Readings 2015

“Our drinking team has a biking problem.” Again, trend-setters. Now about 30 teams have their own post-race T-shirts.

A mix of serious fundraising and serious fun drives the Pep’s crew from starting line to finish line – a two-day, 150-mile coastal journey to the tip of Cape Cod, Provincetown.

Day 1 takes them through Hingham, Cohasset, Scituate and Marshfield. It ends after 75 miles at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy.

“At that point, the first thing I look forward to is a nice hot shower,” Pep says. “Then to crack an ice cold beer.”

The finish

Day 2 starts early, at 4:30 a.m. After breakfast the bikers hit the road, within 5 miles coming up against what Pep thinks is the most strenuous part of the ride, the Bourne Bridge.

“It’s probably a mile climb and doesn’t look like much going over in a car, but on a bike so early in the morning (it) wakes you up pretty fast,” Pep says.

The Day 2 ride takes them through Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Harwich, Brewster, Eastham, Wellfleet and into Provincetown.

They finish to a crowd of cheering

spectators.

“There’s music and a DJ calling out names of people crossing the finish line,” Pep says.

The riders dismount and enjoy lunch, then head to a boat for a three-hour cruise back to Boston.

Enthusiasm drives the Peddlers: the

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John “Pep” Pipitone

enthusiasm of the cheering crowds, the enthusiasm of fellow riders, and the enthusiasm of the team.

It drives them year-round, too, Pep and the co-captains say.

The spirit

The team grows closer through year-round gatherings and long rides.

They host outings and fundraisers. Some of them keep in shape in winter through spinning sessions at the Burbank YMCA, which allows the group to train there from January through April.

They also get together for spring

training sessions, typically 10 training rides. These are gatherings at a teammate’s home with pre-ride fruit and water, a group ride, and the day topped off with a meal and refreshments.

All the pedaling, in training and on the Getaway, brings the group closer, said Ferullo, a sales manager for a liquor

distributor.

“When you are riding five or six hours, or training two or three hours, a lot of conversations come up,” Ferullo said. “You get to know somebody.”

You also get to know more about MS, and motivated to help find a cure, according to Douglass.

“I tell you, we are invested in finding a cure,” he said.

Pep said the ride is a powerful event.

“It is emotional when you do the ride,” he said. “You have people cheering you on. You are doing something for yourself and for others.” **R**

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