

# Local cyclists in Race Across America

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In mid-June, 245 cycling enthusiasts will begin pedaling in a six- to nine-day bicycle race that starts in California. Over the course of their journey, they will ride 3,000 miles through 14 states - before wrapping things up at City Dock in Annapolis.

The Race Across America is clearly not for your average cycling enthusiast.

Unlike the Tour de France, which is raced in stages, the Race Across America runs continuously from start to finish.

There are about 30 solo racers who stop along the way only to sleep, finishing the race in nine to 12 days. But the majority of the competitors are teams that race relay-style as two-, four- or eight-person groups.



The Annapolis area boasts two teams in this year's race. There is an eight-member military team, Team 4Mil, made up of members from every branch of the military: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy. And there's a team of four local medical professionals, Team Doc2Doc.

Race Across America teams always have a cyclist on the road, 24 hours a day. Along the 3,000-mile trip, they check in at 54 predetermined stations.

Typically, teams have a road crew in a recreational vehicle that drives ahead and waits, and have a chase van that follows the cyclists. For the weeklong journey, the RV is the team's home away from home; it's where they eat and sleep.

Back in 1982, when the Race Across America got its start - it was called "The Great American Bike Race" back then - it began in San Diego and ended in New York City.

Over the years the starting and ending points changed, but three years ago organizers fell in love with bicycle-friendly Annapolis and moved the end of the race here. Race director Rick Boethling said he hopes the change is permanent.

## **Team Doc2Doc**

The local four-man medical team is using the race to raise money for three charities: the Wellness House of Annapolis, the Helping Hands Foundation and the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults.

Dr. Garth Smith is a hand surgeon who got involved in cycling 10 years ago when his brother, Houston, who had brain cancer, gave him a bike. Smith is racing in memory of his brother, and said the team decided last fall to participate in the race and raise money for charity in the process.

"We are not new to the sport. Most of us have been cyclists for a long time," he said.

They hope to raise \$15,000 to \$20,000 for each of their charities.

Other racers on the team include Bill Vickers, an endurance athlete who at one point had hoped to participate as a soloist. A near-fatal accident and subsequent surgeries made him alter his plan.

Another is Dr. Jeff Gelfand, a hand surgeon and the founder of Helping Hands, which helps the less fortunate obtain medically necessary procedures.

Rounding out the group is Dr. Richard Hardart, a pediatric anesthesiologist who has been cycling for eight years.

The four-member team will be assisted by a group of other medical professionals from Anne Arundel Medical Center who will be using both a chase van and an RV.

The team plans to ride in six-hour shifts.

"It will vary depending on how we happen to feel at that time a day," Smith said. "We will take a six-hour block of time, and while we are on the road the other two will sleep and rehydrate."

Smith said the team hopes to make it back to Annapolis by June 19 - meaning they will try to finish the race, which starts on June 12, in seven days.

## **Team 4Mil**

Coast Guard Lt. Roy Collins is the team coach for the Naval Academy cycling team, which practices locally at Quiet Waters Park.

Last year during a team ride at Quiet Waters, Collins and Capt. Dan Schindler, a mathematics instructor at the Naval Academy and the cycling team's officer representative, decided to build a team that would represent each branch of the military.

Collins said the two then started networking.

The team now includes Collins and Schindler plus Navy Midshipman 1st Class Peggy LeGrand, Marine Corps Master Sgt. Tom Draffen, Marine Corps Capt. Kyle Pitman, Air Force Maj. Jim Weinstein, Air Force 2nd Lt. Adam Kruse and Army Master Sgt. Dean Wagner, who lost his right arm in Iraq.

The team is racing for the Wounded Warriors Project, and hopes to raise \$100,000. Schindler said the team has an ambitious plan to ride 500 miles each day.

"Our mission is to raise public awareness to the WWP, while the WWP's mission is to raise awareness for the needs of severely injured servicemen and women," Collins said.