

Maryland wants to recycle cross-state bike race

POSTED: 7:28 PM THU, JUNE 10, 2010

BY **LIZ FARMER**

DAILY RECORD BUSINESS WRITER

Cycling legend Lance Armstrong won the Tour Du Pont in both 1995 and 1996.



Cycling legend Lance Armstrong won the Tour Du Pont in both 1995 and 1996.

Fourteen years after the annual mid-Atlantic cycling race Tour Du Pont abruptly ended, state officials and cycling enthusiasts are trying to bring a race to Maryland in 2012 that could generate as much as \$40 million in annual spending.

Tour de Maryland would be a seven-day cycling event covering roads in all five regions of the state — Southern, central and Western Maryland; the Eastern Shore and the capital region, according to Terry Hasseltine, the state's director of sports marketing who is trying to position the race as a mid-spring precursor to the Tour de France.

"It's a great way to showcase the state's tourism assets, and it draws a major international following," Hasseltine said. "We're talking the likes of Lance Armstrong and others participating."

Hasseltine is working with sports promoter Medalist Sports LLC to get statewide support for the event and sell it to a title sponsor. The Georgia-based company also ran the Tour Du Pont, which began as the Tour de Trump in 1989 and 1990, then was sponsored by the Du Pont company from 1991 to 1996. Medalist also runs the Amgen Tour of California, considered one of the pre-eminent races in the U.S. and a build-up race to the Tour de France.

The California race generates more than \$40 million in spending each year, and a similar race, the Tour of Missouri, generates \$38.1 million in spending, Hasseltine said.

Chris Aronhalt, managing partner at Medalist Sports, said he would ideally like to sign a title sponsor to a multi-year deal that would cover half or three-quarters of the projected \$3 million to \$4 million annual cost of putting on the race.

"We'll basically look at corporations based in Maryland who support the state and support economic development," he said. "And obviously who would have an interest in ... having the tour be a marketing platform for their product."

He noted the international draw of cycling events and the television coverage — in which sponsors are frequently mentioned — makes these events financially worth a title sponsor's while. In 1992, Du Pont estimated it received almost \$70 million worth of international media exposure for its \$1.7 million spent in sponsoring the race.

Tour of California, which catapulted onto the cyclist scene in 2009 after Armstrong added it to his schedule, airs in the U.S. on the Versus network, which also broadcasts the Tour de France. Armstrong's appearance helped lift the race to distribution in more than 90 other countries in 2009.

Aronhalt said Medalist Sports would try for similar coverage for the Tour de Maryland, but noted it would probably not get that level of exposure in the first year.

"A project of this magnitude, certainly it's a walk before you run," he said. "California is in its fifth year."

Hasseltine, who began talking with Medalist Sports a year ago, said the Tour de Maryland was by no means a "go," but if launching the race in 2012 was not possible, his office would shoot for 2013 or 2014.

"It takes a lot of logistical work and human power," he said. "I feel good that Medalist came in ... but we'll move the needle when the time is right."

Neil Sandler, publisher of Frederick-based Spokes Magazine, said the potential to draw crowds for cycling here was "huge." He remembers the days when people would crowd along the Tour Du Pont route in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia.

The race had its first American winner in 1992 with Greg LeMond, and three years later then-up-and-comer Armstrong took the title in 1995 and 1996.

"The Inner Harbor was wall-to-wall crowds and people were hanging out of parking garages to get a view," Sandler said. "They came from all over the world to stand there and watch these guys race ... [and now] cycling has become much more mainstream."