

BACKGROUND

10th Annual Friends For Life Bike Rally

As long as there's a reason...there's a ride.



Introduction

Now honouring its tenth anniversary, the Friends For Life Bike Rally has grown to become the second-largest fundraiser benefiting an HIV/AIDS organization in Canada. This year, riders and crew aim to raise over \$1 million to benefit the Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (PWA) through two different biking adventures from Toronto to Montreal. Our large group of cyclists will make the six-day, 600 km trek all the way from Toronto to Montreal and, for the first time ever, a smaller group of riders will join the Bike Rally at the midway point in Kingston to complete the final three days of the journey.

The Bike Rally (as it is commonly known to riders and crew) will see up to 400 riders and 100 crew members working together to move a small community with a unified goal: to raise big awareness and big money to support people living with HIV and AIDS in Toronto.

Our riders cycle an average of 101 km a day along the beautiful stretches of secondary highway (mostly Highway #2) between Toronto, Kingston and Montreal. Our steadfast volunteer crew moves on – tearing down campsites, preparing some 9,000 meals, and moving over 1,000 huge bins filled with personal effects and camping supplies. Safety officials keep an eye on the winding procession of cyclists, from back to front and many points in between; while a volunteer team of wellness professionals monitors the health and safety of all involved during our rigorous journey. We are riders of all levels – experienced athletes and recreational cyclists, but thanks to three months of training we all keep a strong pace, averaging 18-20 km/hr.

When we stop at night, people notice. Picture 44 trucks, vans, and cars, huge meal shelters, a mobile food station, 500 tents, 400 bikes, aisles upon aisles of huge storage bins, and you'll get a sense of our impressive footprint.

We depart Toronto with great fan-fare, sent off in style by community leaders, our families, partners, friends, and our many generous sponsors. We are celebrated along the way by a dozen or more communities, and friends who have come to anticipate our annual adventure. And finally, we arrive in grand style in Montreal. Wearing matching jerseys, the cyclists will group together and wind our way along the Lachine Canal into the heart of downtown Montreal, where we again meet loved ones, friends, and our supporters for an unforgettable celebration.

History

Ten years ago, the Bike Rally started as a brave challenge between a dedicated PWA board member and an enthusiastic supporter. Neither was an avid cyclist, though they imagined it was possible to bike from Toronto to Montreal within a week. They initiated that challenge, brought together people who would support them, and started a fundraising tradition that has grown tremendously in such a short period of time.

In the first few years of the Bike Rally, rider and crew populations were small. In fact, it started with only 23 riders and six crew members. Challenges were dealt with on the road and on the fly; discovery and organization came with each new hurdle. Crew and riders cooked their own food and worked with a small squad of a borrowed van and a truck.

As our population grew, and awareness of the event increased, so too did the need for big logistical management. Today the ride employs the services of a catering company, a volunteer professional health and wellness team as well as a mechanics team, and when it comes to a nightly rest, it fills up entire wings of campsites along the journey.

This year, Bike Rally participants are celebrating a significant milestone: ten years of making a difference for people living with HIV/AIDS in Toronto and Ontario.

Toronto People With AIDS Foundation

PWA is the **largest direct support service agency** of its kind for people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada. Since 1987, PWA has been providing essential services to those **living** with HIV/AIDS – including men, women, and children.

PWA provides over 17 separate services in four program areas: income support, food programs, treatment programs & health promotion programs.

Although there is often greater knowledge of HIV/AIDS issues in urban centres like Toronto, infection rates are still on the rise.

The Friends For Life Bike Rally is PWA's primary fundraiser. Since the Bike Rally started, almost \$4.5 million has been raised, allowing the agency to provide critical services to over 3,500 people each year.

Before we go... training and more

You will never hear a Bike Rally rider state that this event is just a few days spent riding a bike in July. Each and every rider faces serious challenges before they ride. Most will spend three months or more preparing their bodies and minds for this rigorous ride. All six-day riders will dedicate themselves to raising a minimum of \$2,200 to participate in the ride and in the process, while three-day riders will raise \$2,000 each – all riders will share the story of PWA's important work with each donor they reach. Similarly, volunteer crew members will also assist in the fund raising efforts, over and above their remarkable time and labour contributions during the ride.

Training is essential for every single Bike Rally participant. Bike Rally organizers and volunteers are offering over 41 separate development clinics in 2008, covering topics ranging from nutrition and rider safety to bike maintenance and fundraising seminars. Whether it's first aid or hands-on instruction for our crew members, or over 1,000 km of riding around the Greater Toronto Area – no one starts this voyage without putting in a tremendous pre-ride effort.

Raising Funds

Most experienced riders will admit that one of the most challenging elements of the Bike Rally is achieving the fundraising commitment by June 30. For most new riders, this is the first time they have ever found themselves asking friends, family, co-workers, or complete strangers to support them and their cause at such levels. The Bike Rally builds great fundraisers. In 2007, the average amount raised by each rider was \$3,197 and in Bike Rally history, the most ever raised by a single rider was \$23,108.

The Bike Rally is a grassroots, volunteer-driven fundraiser. Championed by a volunteer steering committee, the Bike Rally focuses on turning a maximum amount of funds back to the foundation.

Toronto's best training routes

Bike Rally organizers are well known in Toronto for concocting some of the most interesting, challenging, and fun training routes around the GTA. From Pickering to Oakville, and north to Aurora, our training routes (over 28 this year) put riders to the test. Training starts in April, with threats of spring snow lurking in the air and wrap up just a week before we go, in the unkind heat of July. With ride lengths graduating from 34 km all the way up to 126 km or more, it's not uncommon for riders to log well over 1,000 km on training routes before they even start on their trek to Montreal.

Organization - Who's who on the Bike Rally

Events of this size do not come together without tremendous organization. Each year as the Bike Rally grows, it becomes increasingly important to bring in committed volunteers and professionals who provide much-needed skills. The two co-chairs and steering committee spend over 11 months of the year meticulously planning for the event.

Road Safety

Well before cyclists reach the top of a monumental hill, they may hear the call "*Road Safety!*" This animated crew of volunteers has the critical task of protecting our riders as we pedal to Montreal. Road Safety acts as the first point of contact in the event of problems. They also act as spokespersons in the many communities we pass through, answering questions from curious on-lookers and frequently taking donations. Road Safety is

also responsible for the daunting task of physically marking the entire route. Advance crews drop flags at hard-to-spot route turns and mark the major intersections to keep riders on the right path.

Rubbermaid Rustlers

Named for one of the Bike Rally's long-term sponsors, this team of hard-working volunteers is comprised of women and men, who transport, load and unload all participants' belongings and gear site to site in several cube trucks. Based on 500 cyclists and crew, that's 1,000 storage bins – twice a day. Over six days, the crew handle the equivalent of 12,000 bins, each averaging 55 pounds! The Rustler team also prepares campsites in advance of cyclists' arrival by setting up massage tents, moving picnic tables into dining areas, and setting up other supplies and equipment as needed. Upon completion of the Rally, the team transports bicycles back to Toronto and returns supplies to storage.

Food Crew

Nothing would happen without this essential ingredient. Working closely with professional caterers, the food crew is responsible for providing and cleaning up after 9,000 separate meals during the Bike Rally. Up at dawn, this crew is brewing the coffee that wakes up our whole population, and keeps the food served until sun down. Our food crew volunteers (or *Foodies* as they're affectionately known) are trained in food safety handling skills and provide cheerful and warm support when our riders are sore and exhausted.

Wellness

Since the earliest days of the Bike Rally, health and wellness have been critical in keeping riders and crew safe and sound. What started as one nurse with a lot of cold-compresses has now become a formidable health and wellness team. The demands of a 600 km journey, coupled with extreme heat and the constant dangers of dehydration and injury, keep our dedicated volunteer staff of nurses, paramedics, massage therapists, and even a stretching instructor in high demand.

Sponsorship support

The Bike Rally enjoys strong support from the community. Alongside major and partnering sponsors are those who contribute substantial in-kind services and goods. We would never make it all the way without them.

Presenting Sponsor Scotiabank Group

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Why do we do it?

We're riding and volunteering for a cause – to assist those living with HIV/AIDS. The Bike Rally is a powerful, inclusive event that brings together a group of vastly diverse people who rise to meet an incredible physical and mental challenge.