

Greenway cyclists blaze a trail through East Cooper area

BY BRIGITTE SURETTE
SPECIAL TO THE MOULTRIE NEWS

Cyclists from the East Coast Greenway stopped by the Farmer's Market in Mount Pleasant on Tuesday, Oct. 20 for a brief respite from their long-distance tour. Its members were a bit weary but enthusiastic about the progress they'd made so far, and the miles ahead of them as they make their way to Key West, Fla. Cycling about 60 miles per day, they started their trek on Sept. 12 and plan to finish up on Nov. 3.

The East Coast Greenway Alliance, a national nonprofit organization whose main purpose is to map out and develop a route that crosses 15 states, will enable people of all ages and abilities to safely enjoy and explore the Eastern seaboard. Linking major cities from Calais, Maine all the way to Key West, Florida including Washington, D.C., the greenway is on its way to becoming a reality. Their goal is to complete a permanent off-road trail linking the cities by 2010. The greenway will cover approximately 2,600 miles down the coast.

The 10-member team of cyclists range in age from 50 to 78 and come from New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Maine and even Arizona. Ann and Mike Kruimer, both 50, from New Jersey, are cycling their way on a specially-made cycle that allows, Ann, a paraplegic, to enjoy the journey she so passionately believes in.

Ann was in a car accident 12 years ago that left her paralyzed. Instead of giving up, she was on a bicycle 11 months after the accident.

"We've always enjoyed cycling and we didn't want to give it up because of the accident," Mike noted. "We decided in February to make this journey because we want our granddaughter to have the opportunity to see the Eastern seaboard in a safe way if she decides she wants to."

Ann and Mike raised the \$20,000 fee to start and finish their journey from friends and businesses in their community. Mike is the President of the New Jersey Bicycle Club and represents New Jersey in the East Coast Greenway Alliance.

Ann, a cyclist before and after her accident, said, "This is the best way to see the nature and beauty of our cities and coastlines. Wherever



Mount Pleasant Mayor Pro Tem Kruger Smith greets the cyclists during their stop in town

PHOTOS BY BRIGITTE SURETTE

er we've gone, we've gotten support and a lot of thumbs up, and people everywhere have been very nice. We've received a very warm welcome from the nice people in Mount Pleasant. I want my granddaughter to have such an experience and have a safe route to do this."

Greeting from mayor pro tem

Mayor Pro Tem Kruger Smith was there to give a warm welcome to the East Coast Greenway Alliance. His response to their undertaking was a positive one. "I think it's a nice thing to do. I imagine it can be fraught with difficulties, especially in densely populated areas. In Mount Pleasant, we've got about 45 miles of sidewalks, that give our residents

a safe place to enjoy our town. The greenway is something we could be open to doing. Although we have no plans in the making right now, we plan a lot for our community and residents and are always open to new ideas."

Mac Sexton, the tour leader, said that, for the most part, their experience has been positive. "Our oldest member, a 78-year old man from North Carolina had a scare in Fredericksburg, Va., on Route 1. There was no shoulder and he fell off his bike, broke his thumb, knocked out three teeth, and hurt his shoulder. I advised him to stop, but he wouldn't give up and got right back on. He wanted to finish and plans to have his teeth replaced once he gets home!

Safety issues on Highway 17

"We like South Carolina and love the people and beauty of the coastline. But we need greenways to get around it. We can't get from here to there along this coast safely down Route 17, which is really the only artery south along the coast. Highway 17 has no shoulder, which forced us into the busy traffic. We had no problems because our tour driver alerted other drivers, but a path needs to be constructed so that cyclists have a safe route to follow along the highway," said Sexton.

According to Sexton, who lives in Maine, their tourism increased after putting in the greenway in his hometown. "We had much opposition

when we first proposed the idea, but our residents wouldn't take anything for it now. Our children use it to get to and from school, visitors use it for cycling, walking and a safe way to explore our town and nature. It's brought our entire community together," he said.

The group's members are an inspiration to anyone who's ever had a dream or cause they believe in strongly. Jack Kurrle, 74, was making the same route three years ago. On Highway 17 in Mount Pleasant, Kurrle was struck from behind by a motorist and broke his neck and leg in several places. Within three years, he's back again, determined to complete the tour.

The Tour Support Vehicle Driver and State Chairperson for Maine, Tony Barrett said, "Jack's a bit nervous going down Highway 17 again, but he's determined, as we all are to complete this so that the greenway becomes a reality."

Janine Peccini, South Carolina's State Chairperson and Advocate for the cause states, "We're very excited about the response we've been getting and providing a safe trail for residents to use for recreation, tourism and transportation. The East Coast Greenway Alliance is a grassroots organization and depends on members of the community to support its cause by encouraging political leaders in the community to get actively involved in its completion. The Department of Transportation is



Wearied traveler rests against his vehicle of choice.

behind the idea and I believe city planners are beginning to realize the importance of the East Coast Greenway for its cities and communities."

For those of us who aren't brave enough to cycle down Highway 17 yet, perhaps the East Coast Greenway Alliance will give us the opportunity to do so in the very near future.

To get involved in the East Coast Greenway Alliance, visit their Web site at www.greenway.org or call Janine Peccini at 843-546-8502.

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