

Children's course added to annual charity ride

Keely Grasser

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This year's Ride for Karen will have adults and children alike cycling to raise money to send children with cancer to camp.

That's because alongside the 25 and 160-kilometre routes featured in years past, a new ride for children two to 12 will be introduced at this year's popular fundraiser.

Markham brothers Kris and Kirk Tobias started the Ride for Karen after their mother, Karen, died from breast cancer.



Markham brothers Kirk (centre) and Kris (right) Tobias lead the annual Ride for Karen charity event. A children's ride has been added to this year's fundraiser, which helps send children with cancer to camp.

Launched in 2002, the event has become one of Ontario's premier cycling events and has raised \$675,000 for cancer care facilities, cancer support centres and to send kids with cancer to camp.

It has grown from the small group of 30 or 35 cyclists who took part in the inaugural event to one that attracted about 350 participants last year.

"People have just been very, very happy with the quality of the event and they keep coming back and bringing their friends," Kris said.

Their fight is against a disease that affects so many.

"I think there's this concept of six degrees of separation. With cancer, there's no such thing as six degrees any more. You'd be hard-pressed to find someone who hasn't been touched by cancer," Kirk said.

Every cent of the money raised by participants through pledges goes to help kids with cancer.

Camp Oochigeas, near Parry Sound, is one of the recipients of these funds.

Young cancer patients attend the camp at no cost to their families, explained Rob Drynan, the camp's executive director.

But children don't always have to travel up north to capture the camp experience.

The Ride for Karen, among other donors, has helped the camp start Ooch on the Eighth, a day camp set up on the eighth floor — the cancer ward — of the Hospital for Sick Children.

It now runs five days and three evenings a week for day patients and in-patients, Mr. Drynan said.

They may not be able to swim and canoe, but he said favourite activities at Ooch on the Eighth include crafts and walkie-talkie Battleship, great for children who can't leave their rooms.

The hospital camp had one full-time employee this year and two more are being added to the roster.

Ride for Karen has made a significant contribution to the program and really helped get it off the ground, Mr. Drynan said.

Kris said his mother would be proud of their efforts.

With the addition of this year's children's ride, Kris and Kirk's own children will ride this year, just like their dads.

The kids' cycle, which starts at 12:30 p.m., will be held on the school grounds.

Children are encouraged to secure pledges for every lap they complete. Other attractions planned are face painting, snacks and inflatable toys.

This year's goal is to raise \$325,000 to take the event to the \$1-million threshold.

How to participate:

- The 160 km ride, which starts at 9 a.m., and the 25 km event, which starts at 1 p.m., begin at St. Joan of Arc High School in Maple.
- Register for both online until Sept. 6 at 6 p.m. Same day registration is available beginning at 7:30 a.m. for the 160km event and 11:30 a.m. for the 25 km.
- There is no entry fee for the children's event. Registration starts at 11:30 a.m
- Visit rideforkaren.com to register, for more details about any of the day's events or to donate.