



CowaLUNGa bike tour helps residents breath easy

By JOSEPH MULLER - gurnee@weeklyjournals.com

GURNEE – All types of bike riders – no matter how old or young, experienced or amateur – were able to ride in the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago’s 12th annual CowaLUNGa, a charity bike tour that began at Gurnee Mills on Aug. 2.

In past years, the RHAMC has made as much as \$300,000 from the event, and officials estimated that the organization would top that total this year.

Joel Africk, chief operating officer of the RHAMC, said he was impressed with the riders' ability to raise money.

“If the can raise more money than last year in a bad economy, they can do anything,” Africk said.

Niki Bartosiak, trek director of CowaLUNGa, said most participants raise more than the minimum amount of money needed to participate in the event: \$50 for one day riders, and \$295 for riders who ride more than one day.

“Our riders are really touched by our cause,” Bartosiak said.

The more than 300 bike-tour participants got to choose between riding one, two, or three of the bike tour’s days – making the tour accessible to all levels biking experience.

The oldest rider of the bike tour, 81-year-old Ira Graham, rode on the tour’s first day.

A regular bike rider, Graham didn’t have to do too much extra training.

“I’m happy that I’m able to do something like this,” Graham said.

Some bikers train the whole year for the tour’s three-day, 160-mile trail.

“It feels really good to go past that finish line,” said Kevin Radejew, who rode past the CowaLUNGa three-day finish line last year.

Because tour volunteers with medical experience focus on keeping bike riders hydrated and healthy, most riders were not concerned about the warm weather, or the length of the trip.

“We are extra careful about our riders health,” Bartosiak said.

Between days, bikers got to rest at William’s Bay and White Water in Wisconsin, where the tour leads. Bartosiak said the trail traveled was determined from bikers’ suggestions from past tours.

“This trail combines the best of each year,” Bartosiak said.

RHAMC – a lung research, advocacy, and education group – will use the money from the bike tour to fund programs in the Chicago and Cook County area.

Carol Stream resident and CowaLUNGa participant Joe Oxendine said being able to see where this event’s money goes in the Chicago area keeps him coming back every year.