

Local women cycle to raise awareness of Huntington's



Left to right, Charlotte Reicks, Gary Heiman and Marie Nemeč are riding in the òVentue to Vegasö Huntington's Disease Bicycle Ride at the send off breakfast at Sherwood Park Saturday morning.

By [Emily Anderson](#)

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For the 14th consecutive year, Grand Junction residents Marie Nemeč and Charlotte Reicks are traveling to the annual Huntington's Disease Society of America Convention.

As usual, they will get there by bike.

Nemeč, 68, and Reicks, 76, raise money each year by asking a mailing list full of supporters nationwide to pledge money to the Huntington's society if the pair bikes to the convention's various locations, which have included Oklahoma City, San Diego, Phoenix, Atlanta, and Minneapolis. Sometimes the two drive or take a train to a starting point. Other times, like this year, they depart from Grand Junction. This year's trip, which began Sunday, will take them to Las Vegas in time for the convention June 8-10.

Neither Nemeč nor Reicks have Huntington's but have taken up the cause because of their Christian faith. In 1997, Nemeč said she connected in an on-line writers group with a Florida woman whose husband had Huntington's. The woman wrote a book about her husband's struggle with the genetic disease and asked Nemeč to help her sell copies of the book at the Huntington's Disease Society of America Convention in 1998 in Denver.

Nemeč, who lived in Colorado Springs at the time, met people from all over Colorado and the U.S. with Huntington's at the convention. The inherited disease breaks down nerve cells in the brain, usually starting when people are in their 40s or 50s but sometimes earlier, and leads to mental, physical and behavioral difficulties.

“I felt sorry for them because they just had the wrong side of the coin come up,” Nemeč said. “I'm not really an activist but I felt I had to do something to help these people.”

The next year, she heard Reicks and a friend planned to travel from the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic Coast by bicycle on behalf of the American Bible Society. Nemec asked to tag along and stop at the East Coast convention that year. The two-month trip went so well Nemec and Reicks decided to bike every year to raise awareness and collect the occasional donation along the way for Huntington's.

The trips have taken the pair through every state except Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan and Nevada. That last state will be crossed off the list in June.

Reicks said taking back roads, chatting with people along the way and staying overnight at small town churches has helped them build a lengthy mailing list of people to ask for donations each year. The rides have also provided plenty of adventures, including getting caught in a sudden storm in New Mexico and meeting a woman who had Huntington's in her husband's family in Texas.

"Through this terrible, horrible disease we've seen the United States and met people across the U.S.," Reicks said.

The trips haven't all been easy. The pair travel up to 75 miles a day and aren't always where they will stay at night when they head out each morning.

"Bicycling is very difficult. We haven't found a place in America that's flat," Reicks said.

Proceeds from the bike rides help benefit research and services for people with Huntington's, including people in Grand Junction with the disease. Reicks and Nemec help with a local Huntington's support group that meets at 6 p.m. the last Tuesday of each month at First United Methodist Church. About 12 to 15 people, some with the disease and others who are there for support, come to each meeting, Nemec said.

"Even though it is a relatively rare disease, there are people right here in Grand Junction who have Huntington's disease," she said.

To learn more about Nemec and Reick's journey, visit bikeforthe cure.org.