

Pedaling 1,000 miles to fight devastating disease

By Kristy Zurbrick

Madison Editor

For the third straight summer, Gary Heiman of West Jefferson is signed up to pedal nearly 1,000 miles to raise money and awareness for the Huntington's Disease Society of America (HDSA).

This year, he will ride from Galveston, Texas, to Jacksonville, Fla., in the "Pedal to the Gulf." The ride runs June 8-20, leading up to the 28th Annual HDSA Convention, set for June 21-23 in Jacksonville.

Heiman became involved with the annual fundraiser through his wife, Barbara Heiman, a social worker with the HDSA Central Ohio Chapter and the Ohio State University Center of Excellence.

"The more I learned about this disease,

the more I wanted to do something about it," he said.

Over the last two years, Heiman has raised over \$7,000 for the cause, which benefits research and family services. As for his fundraising goal this year, he said the sky's the limit.

"I'm retired from a job in sales. If I believe in a product, I will go after it," he said.

Two years ago, Heiman, who cycles 2,000 miles a year in and around West Jefferson, was one of three people who participated in the bike ride. Last year, another rider joined the pack, a woman whose son has Huntington's Disease.

"This year, we are up to nine people," he said.



Gary Heiman of West Jefferson (left) and Devon Walker of Upper Arlington will ride nearly 1,000 miles from Texas to Florida to raise money and awareness for the Huntington's Disease Society of America.

Among the newbies is Devon Walker, a kindergarten teacher and high school softball coach from Upper Arlington. She decided to join the ride after watching a video Heiman put together chronicling his experiences.

"I was inspired. I thought, 'I need to do this,'" she said.

As much as Walker's involvement supports the cause and spreads the word about HD, it also serves as a spiritual journey for her. She grew up in a household where her mother took care of her grandmother, who suffered from the disease. Walker's great-uncle, also afflicted with HD, died last November. Her mother is now taking care of her uncle who is living with the disease.

"(Through the ride) I will be meeting people from across the country who are caring for people with Huntington's Disease. It's a great way for us to come together," she said.

While she's an athlete, this is Walker's first foray into long distance bike riding. She is getting tips and even doing training rides with Heiman, whom she met at an HD caregivers support group she joined two years ago. She also became a member of the Central Ohio Chapter board last fall.

"Any way that I can try to make a difference, I'm going to do it," she said.

Heiman and Walker are collecting donations. They are paying for their own ride expenses, so all donations go straight to the cause. To contribute, make checks payable to "Huntington's Disease Society of America" and mail them to: Pedal the Gulf for HD, c/o Marie Nemeč, 3087 - A 1/2 Road, Grand Junction, CO 81503-9678.

Donations also can be made securely online at www.firstgiving.com/bikeforcure.

About Huntington's Disease

Huntington's Disease (HD) is a neurological, genetic disease passed from parent to child through a mutation on the fourth chromosome. Each child of an HD parent has a 50 percent chance of inheriting the gene which causes degeneration of brain cells, resulting in the loss of ability to walk, think, talk, reason and swallow. Onset generally appears at midlife but, in some, onset occurs in childhood or in old age.

The disease profoundly affects the lives of entire families, as the person with HD becomes totally dependent on others for his or her care. About one in 10,000 Americans has this disease. Since 1993, a genetic test has been available to those at risk, to determine whether they carries the HD gene. The test does not indicate at what age the disease will develop.

For more information, consult:

- Huntington's Disease Society of America: 1-800-345-HDSA, www.hdsa.org;
- HD Advocacy Center: hdac.org;
- HD Lighthouse: hdlighthouse.org.

For more information about local fundraising efforts, contact Gary Heiman at (614) 879-9069. Heiman also is accepting donation at his home address, 1060 Olmstead Road, West Jefferson OH 43162. (Make checks out to "Huntington's Disease Society of America.")

Marie Nemeč, one of the founders of the ride, will blog about the highlights and progress of each day of this year's ride. Send an email to ronnemec@gmail.com to request a subscription. The ride also can be tracked at www.bikefortheure.org.

Hydrant flushing scheduled in Mount Sterling

The village of Mount Sterling will flush hydrants April 22-26. The water will be a little discolored. Village residents should let their water run for a few seconds; it is safe to drink. For more information, call the village offices at (740) 869-2040.

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