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What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

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Prerequisite For This 100-Mile Ride: A Lot Of Heart by Anne Levin

They usually travel in packs. Heads thrust forward, chests hunkered down over thighs and posteriors clad in padded lycra shorts, bicyclists have become a familiar presence on rural roads. More often than not, they are pedaling with a purpose. They ride to raise money for causes that are close to their hearts.



Battle Against Hunger riders

For Chuck Inman, director of operations for the Museum of Modern Art's distribution center in South Brunswick; Bob Dunn, a financial planner with Private Wealth Management Group at 512 Executive Drive; Cathy Johnson, an office administrator with the pharmaceutical research and development startup Snowdon Inc. at One Deer Park Drive; and Rich Armington, a software engineer at SciTec at 100 Wall Street in Research Park; and 33 other riders, most of whom work full-time and train on the side, riding has an important purpose: feeding the hungry. On Friday, September 10, they will undertake the eighth annual Battle Against Hunger, a 200-mile trek from Gettysburg, PA, to Trenton. When they cruise into Trenton's Cadwalader Park on Sunday evening, September 12, tired but exhilarated, they will be welcomed home with a celebratory party to which the public is invited.

The funds they raise — their goal is \$100,000 — will go to the Rescue Mission of Trenton, the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, the Crisis Ministry of Trenton and other agencies in Montclair, Atlantic City, and Philadelphia. The riders have been training for this three-day trip for months.

While other charity bicycle trips such as the 500-mile Anchor House Ride for Runaways (which raised \$460,000 at its 33rd ride this past July) vary their itineraries, the Battle Against Hunger always begins at the historic Gettysburg battlefield. The site of the gruesome Civil War confrontation is what inspired the "Battle Against Hunger" moniker seven years ago after Inman and members of his church had decided to organize a bike ride for charity.

"It was in April, 2003. One of the gentlemen at work; my wife, Pam; and I had gone on a trip down to Gettysburg," Inman says. "We went onto the battlefield in the very early morning, when there was a big mist. You could feel the spirit of the men who had given their lives, on both sides. We were really moved by the fact that these guys were willing to commit their lives to causes they believed in. We were committed to the concept of providing for those who were less fortunate than us, and hungry. So it just made sense. Our motto became, 'We're fighting hunger, one pedal at a time.' And we are fighting the battle."

The Battle Against Hunger raised \$13,000 in that first year. Last year's ride brought in \$80,000. In total, the program has raised \$408,000 over the last seven years.

Participants pay \$260 to cover their meals and hotel bills (they stay one night in Gettysburg, the other in Lancaster, PA), and must raise a minimum of \$750 each. "We made the commitment from day one that we would never take anything from the money we raised," Inman says. "So we gave the money (the first year) to the Rescue Mission and the Soup Kitchen. We were smitten with both agencies and how much they cared for their residents and clientele, how much they reached out to them."

In the second year, riders in support of the Rescue Mission in Atlantic City were added; in year four, a food bank in Philadelphia called Cast Your Cares joined the effort. Two years ago, riders for the Montclair food ministry Toni's Kitchen signed up. Jewish Family Services of Atlantic and Cape May counties are also supported.

Inman stresses that while training and preparation are key, the ride is not limited to Lance

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Armstrong wannabes in top physical shape. "We don't go for professional bike riders," he says. "We go for guys and gals who give their heart to the cause. A lot of them haven't ridden since they were kids. We start training in the beginning of April, riding 10 miles, until we can do 100 miles. We do a fair amount of distance training but we all do it together, and we have a lot of fun doing it."

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During training, riders are broken up into geographical locations, or "pods." As spring turns to summer and the date for the annual ride approaches, participants take to the road a few mornings a week as well as on weekends. As their stamina increases, so does the camaraderie. "A lot of people get a real sense of their own physical development," says Inman. "And they learn the ins and outs of riding in a group, on the highway. We train you how to do that. We train people to learn safety, how to maintain your bike, how to change a flat tire. All of those things are important."

Each pod is formed to help specific organizations. "People want to support the agencies in their communities, especially if they have gotten to know the people who can benefit from their efforts," Inman says. "We go to the agencies we support and meet the residents and the people who work there. A lot of us give time to the agencies, aside from the ride, to help make things better."

Charles P. Inman Jr. is 64 years old. He grew up in Richmond, VA, working in his family's business, a wholesale distributor of candy, tobacco, and institutional food, on weekends and after school. Inman served in Vietnam, distinguishing himself as a helicopter pilot. He was honored with the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Silver Star, and the Purple Heart. After being shot down during the Tet Offensive and seriously wounded in his hand, arm, and face, he spent two years in Walter Reed Army Hospital.

Inman recovered. Following a medical discharge from the army, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting. He taught at the University of Richmond, the University of Texas, and the University of Miami before joining the international accounting firm Peat Marwick Mitchell, staying for five years. Then it was on to a job as financial/operations officer for VIP Enterprises, a national paint manufacturing company, before he was called back to Richmond to help with the family business. "I stayed there for 11 years until we had to sell it," he says. "We got the proverbial offer we couldn't refuse."

A friend Inman knew through the Boy Scouts asked him if he was interested in helping to design warehouses. Inman jumped at the chance. "I'd been in warehouses my whole life, so it was a natural," he says. "The last client we had was MoMA. And then they made me the proverbial offer I couldn't refuse. I have been very blessed, because the museum is a fantastic place to work. I own the business, but we're a subsidiary of the museum. It's the best of both worlds."

Inman's company handles all of MoMA's fulfillment operations, including retail re-supply for their stores in New York City, their mail order and E-commerce business, and wholesale operations of their licensed products with about 1,500 stores around the world. He has 42 employees. "We run it like a small family business," he says. "Every member of the company is part of what we call our team."

Inman lives with his wife, Pam, in South Brunswick. "She's a good bike rider, but has some problems with her back so she doesn't do a lot," he says. "She rides down to Gettysburg with us when we do the tour." The couple's son, Charlie III, lives in Alexandria, VA, with his wife and toddler daughter and works as the information technology representative for a large accounting firm there.

Like so many cyclists, Cathy Johnson was an enthusiastic rider as a child but didn't find much time for cruising around on her bike once work, motherhood, and other demands of adulthood came along. It was her husband, Ken Johnson, an enthusiastic participant in the Battle Against Hunger and a former resident of the Rescue Mission himself, who got her back into riding again. Ken Johnson now works for Valu City Furniture as a warehouse lead.

"When I met Ken, he introduced me to the people he was involved with, and I wound up getting involved," says Johnson, a 52-year-old mother of three. "Everybody was so nice. It was just such a wonderful group of people. I was a support person in 2004 and was raising money for Ken for the ride. Then in the winter of 2005, he said to me, 'You're going to get rid of that Schwinn you've had since you were 14 and get a really nice road bike.' We went to Halter's Cycles in Monmouth Junction and got a bike.

"I started out with regular pedals with the little strappy things, which are important when you're going up hills. The next thing I know, I'm getting bike shoes and clickers. I didn't really think I was ready. I was nervous about getting hooked into them. I thought, 'What if I can't get off?' But by the spring I was learning how to ride that way. It was different. Groups of us would ride together. I did the ride in 2005, and it was such a great experience. I've been involved every since."

Johnson, who lives in Plainsboro, graduated from Rutgers with a bachelor's degree in studio art. She was advertising sales coordinator for the Trenton Times for five years before accepting a buyout in 2008. After taking some classes to update her computer skills, doing volunteer work, and taking some temporary assignments, she recently signed on as office administrator with the pharmaceutical firm Snowdon Inc. The company is focused on four major therapeutic areas with substantial market potential: cancer, acute and chronic pain, neurological disorders, and infectious diseases.

With a filial twist of networking, she landed the job through her twin sister, who works for UMDNJ. "Bill Welsh on the staff there is the founder of Snowdon," Johnson says. "My sister

has been working on their website as a side thing. She posted the job, and she told me, 'I want you to apply.' The next thing I knew I was called in for an interview and got hired. They are the nicest bunch of people you'd ever want to meet. I'm the only one there who is not a scientist."

Since recently shedding 40 pounds, Johnson has found cycling more enjoyable than ever. "Last time I rode, my friend (and fellow rider) Ron (Buchanan, a Lawrenceville police officer) said to me, 'You would be shocked at how much difference 10 or 20 pounds makes on a hill.' So last summer I wasn't working, and I lost weight. My riding improved tenfold. I'm riding so much more differently than I was before. I'm not scared of hills. I don't cry anymore when I see them coming up. I've hit 36 miles per hour, and it's the most fun thing ever. You just have to watch out for deer. It's so liberating. When you're out there in the morning, riding through farm country, and you're smelling all those wonderful smells, it makes you feel like when you were 10. Some people are afraid of going down hills, but I love it."

The upcoming ride will mark Johnson's fourth in five years. "You learn what works for you," she says. "Not everybody does it the same way. My husband can go up a hill at 10 miles per hour, and I can't do that. But the first time I was ever able to go up a hill without stopping and getting back on the bike, I felt like I had really accomplished something. You just push yourself."

At 39, Bob Dunn is among the younger participants in the Battle Against Hunger. The Sergeantsville father of two is impressed with the stamina of his older colleagues. "I'm not anything special here," he says, modestly. "It's a pretty spectacular show of dedication to see this through, and these people in their mid-60s are amazing."

Dunn, a financial planner and wealth manager with Private Wealth Management Group, learned of the Battle Against Hunger five years ago when a client, the late Kinny Gallup, asked him if he was interested in taking part in a charity bike ride. "I said 'Sure,' thinking it was similar to 40 or 50 rides I'd done in the past," Dunn says. "After I made the commitment, I found out the details. I had never ridden 200 miles before in my life. That made me a little leery. Then I had the opportunity to meet Chuck Inman. He started doing training rides out of Pennington. You'd start out at 25 or 30 miles, and before you knew it you were doing a 100-mile training ride and doing it with a great group of people."

Dunn and his wife, Stephanie, a pre-school teacher, personal trainer, and life coach, have two sons, ages five and three. Because of his busy schedule with the boys, Dunn's involvement in the ride is not as social as some other participants in different stages of their lives. But he does take part as much as he can. Dunn especially looks forward to the party that the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen holds each year, just before the ride.

"They cook us a great dinner, and everyone tries to sit down with a resident," Dunn says. "That's what intrigued me so much the first year — meeting people who were at one point either alcoholic or down on their luck and now have transformed their lives from that to real empowerment and enjoyment of their lives, and being a valuable participant in society and to themselves. I got to meet a couple of the guys the very first year, and it had a real impact on me."

To build up stamina for the ride, Dunn incorporates training into his daily commute. "My house [in Sergeantsville] is about 25 miles from the office," he says. "I park my car at Princeton Health and Fitness Center (across Route 206 from the office) and leave a change of clothes in the car. Then after work, I ride home on my bike from the gym. Then in the morning, I ride in again on the bike. It takes me about an hour and a half. On weekends, I either go out on my own or get together with riders from a Yahoo group. Right now, I'm trying to do 60 or 80 miles on the weekends. During the heat wave 10 of us did about 100 miles. Everyone stuck it out and made it. It was a good showing."

The riders in this year's Battle Against Hunger will be driven from Pennington to Gettysburg on Friday morning. A professional tour guide will take them through the battlefield on their bikes that afternoon. Saturday morning at 6:30 a.m., the group begins its 100-mile trip, which will take it on back roads through beautiful country outside Lancaster. "With the exception of a few miles, we're on country roads with no traffic at all," says Inman.

Anyone who needs a break can ride in the SAG (Support and Gear) truck, which follows the cyclists with a ready supply of food and water. "We have a whole team of these people — 37 of them," says Inman. "They are very important to the success of the ride. They go along with us not only on the ride, but periodically throughout the season so they can train as well to provide us with what we need. Both groups work independently of the other but depend upon the other group."

The riders tend to stick together in the beginning, and then start to break apart into different levels. By the end of the trip, new friendships have been formed. "You're talking to people you don't know and you're finding out what drove them to take part," says Dunn. "You meet some amazing people."

The Trenton Museum Society at Ellarslie is sponsoring the reception that will welcome the riders (museum director Brian O. Hill is among them) to Cadwalader Park on Sunday, September 12. The party, which will start when the cyclists arrive at about 6 p.m., is open to the public and will include music and food (which can be purchased).

For Inman, who has been honored for his efforts with the Jefferson Award from the Times of Trenton and the George Washington Award for Human Development from the Trenton Cyrus Lodge #5 of Free and Accepted Masons in Pennington, the party is an eagerly anticipated event. The real payoff, though, comes from putting the proceeds of the Battle Against Hunger

to work.

"It's very rewarding to be able to watch someone who is growing and getting their wings, like a butterfly, to fly again," Inman says. "To know that these ladies and gentlemen have hope, to see that look in their eyes — that's what it's all about."

For Hopewell resident and software engineer Rich Armington, participating in the Battle Against Hunger ride goes beyond the charity work. He writes in an E-mail: "It's a way to meet other people with similar interests and a way for me to structure exercise and have fun doing it. As for the time spent with training, that's only a portion of it. Most importantly one should always look to give something back. How do I make time for this? Well, in the immortal words of Master Yoda: 'Do, or do not. There is no try.'"

Battle Against Hunger Celebrations, Cadwalader Park, Trenton. Sunday, September 12, 6 p.m. Welcome bikers from 200-mile trip to benefit Rescue Mission of Trenton, Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, and the Crisis Ministry. Music and food (for purchase). 732-274-9514 or www.battleagainsthunger.org.

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