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## Bike ride to beach brings in dough

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BETHANY BEACH, Del. — Benjamin Dalley and Joseph Schmitz began biking their way here from the District out of teenage self-interest: their parents wouldn't let them borrow a car.

They had no idea it would be the beginning of a major charity event.

The idea emerged late one July night in 1999 when Mr. Schmitz and Mr. Dalley, both seniors at Georgetown Prep High School in Bethesda, were desperate to get to the beach to hang out with friends. Apparently, 120 miles on pedal power in July heat was not the obstacle to them that it would be for most. It was just for thrills. It was for telling tales.

"The first time it took us 14 hours," said Mr. Dalley, a principal for Gibraltar Asset Management. "Then we were just using converted mountain bikes."

Every year since then, Mr. Dalley of the District and Mr. Schmitz of Bethesda have recruited friends and relatives to join the ride, and last year turned it into a charity event for people with autism. The first charity ride drew about 20 riders. This year, 85 donned biking shorts and helmets to raise funds for research and public awareness about autism.

Each of the riders must raise at least \$500 — some raised as much as \$10,000 — for Autism Speaks, a nonprofit group. The event even garnered some major sponsors, including local construction company Coakley Williams, which donated \$15,000.

This year's ride, which left from the New Carrollton Metro station at 4 a.m. on Friday, has raised about \$80,000 so far. Some riders completed the trip in as little as 10 hours.

The group decided to pedal for charity after hearing about how some of the bikers' relatives were having trouble dealing with autism, a disorder that causes problems with people's abilities to learn and relate with others.

"One of the most difficult parts about this is finding a place where people with autism can fit in," said Brian Han, a community events coordinator from Autism Speaks.

In the first leg of the trip the pack of bikers use back roads to get to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge because it is illegal to bike along Route 50. Once they get to the Bay Bridge, though, they have to get a ride over. The first year the bikers had to hitchhike across, but this year Bullis School in Potomac has provided the team with buses. The remaining trip is large swaths of flat farmlands and strip malls.

Making it all the way to the beach requires determination and endurance. The organizers hired a conditioning coach to help get them in shape. The bikers even have a "jam bike" - a bike equipped with speakers and an iPod - to help take their minds off the grueling ride.

But the biking is not hard for everybody.

"My favorite part is the actual ride," said Kevin Rapp, a second-year rider from Kensington. "I went from being a new rider not knowing anything about the ride to helping to organize the event. I love looking around and seeing all of the people we have brought in."

When the riders finished up at the corner of Garfield Parkway and Coastal Highway in downtown Bethany Beach, the nearby park is crowded with parents and representatives from Autism Speaks and the Lower Delaware Autism Foundation.

"Every year I know the ride will be hard," said Mr. Dalley. "But then I think of the difficulty of dealing with autism. It's nice when we actually touch people."

The group hopes to continue expanding, eventually involving some of the D.C. biking organizations and creating a more stable base for next year's ride.

One rider, Jason Ware, a D.C. native and Army veteran whose brother is autistic, got lost and went another 10 miles past the finishing area.

Still, he said, "I will still definitely try and do this again next year."