

WI-G Helps MS Raise Money While Doing What We Do Best. By Russ Bethe WI-G

WI-G has been helping the National Multiple Sclerosis Society raise money for the fight to end MS for more than a decade. It is one of the more fun community services we do as a chapter. The MS Society asked us to help them with their two day bicycle ride because of our special abilities to get from place to place quick on roadways crowded with 1400 bicycles. They also liked the fact that our bikes were quiet.

The MS150 bike ride (formally known as the Best Dam Bike Tour) raised just over 1.2 million dollars this year. Bicycle riders get pledges to be able to ride the two-day event. The ride started in Waukesha, Wi. and goes to Whitewater via routes ranging from 62 to 100 miles using lesser traveled roads. There are rest stops with food, drink and repair facilities every 9 to 15 miles to cater to the riders every need. Saturday night the 1800 riders and the 400 volunteers stay at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater campus where everyone is treated to a great all you can eat meal and a live band to party with and a dorm room. The next morning after breakfast, the ride continues on to Madison again using routes from 62 to 100 miles long. There is more food in Madison at the end and the bicycles and their riders are given a ride back to the starting point on buses and trucks.

There are 400 volunteers needed to provide support for the 1800 riders. Some run food stops, repair bicycles, drive trucks to move luggage or pick up riders who either break down or just cannot finish the route for whatever reason, or the HAM operators who provide a communication network for the event. Our Best Dam Wings provided about 39 people who patrol the route to help find trouble spots or fix route markings or help provide first aide and some times mechanical help. We also provide some of our co-riders who will help the riders get through some of the tougher heavy traffic intersections. This service is very much appreciated by the riders and the MS Staff. When you get 1800 bicycles on the route it is very hard to get sag trucks and ambulances to a spot on the course quickly. The Wings are able to get through and provide the needed help fast. We also provide a lot of moral support for the riders. It is good feeling for the bicyclists knowing that we are looking out for them and are there to help.

This year was a great weather year with no rain and very pleasant temperatures. We provided lots of on the road repairs, some first aid, and lots of help at intersections. I know everyone involved was very satisfied with the way the event went this year. I know I will be back next year. I may even get my HAM license so that I can be even more effective with my help. The local HAM folks have offered to help us out in this regard before next year.

It is a real good feeling as you are patrolling and you come across someone who has this disease and they are thanking you for your help from the side of the road as you drive by.