



By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Wearing red and blue Bike & Build riding gear, 32 cyclists passed through Imperial Monday on a cross-country trek that is also helping people less fortunate.

Two of the riders, Max Kraft of Ithaca, N.Y., and Collin Hood of Annapolis, Md., stopped east of Imperial to visit about their 72-day excursion that will include 4,087 miles across 18 states.

They started June 5 from Providence, R.I., and are scheduled to finish Aug. 13 in San Francisco after cruising over the Golden Gate Bridge.

But, it's not just a fun, scenic trip for a bunch of 18 to 25 year-olds.

Along the route, the cyclists will stop in 10 cities, where they will join in on construction of Habitat for Humanity homes.

Their last "build day" was in Lawrence, Kan., and the group was scheduled this week to help with another Habitat for Humanity project in Fort Collins, Colo.

Kraft and Hood explained that construction of the homes is usually underway when they arrive on the scene.

"We just go to work when we get there, doing whatever is needed," Kraft said.

Each rider was required to raise a minimum of \$4,000 before they started out last month. Those funds were used to help build a home in Providence, R.I., the community from which they started, as well as to fund smaller grants for affordable housing projects across the United States.

Some is also used for trip expenses, which both men said they try to keep at a minimum.

Kraft, who graduated in May from Cornell University with a biology degree, said he decided to join the ride as a way to help others, who he knows are hurting right now in several parts of the country with inadequate housing.

"It's also a neat opportunity to see more of the country, especially now that I've graduated," Kraft said.

And, he said one of the best parts of the trip is meeting a lot of people along the way.

"People in Nebraska have been especially friendly," he noted.

Hood, who plans to enter law school this fall, was a 2006 Tampa University graduate with a business communications degree. He taught English in Japan for two years before his most recent job at the Japanese Embassy in Washington D.C.

Hood said, as someone with no mortgage or other major responsibilities right now, this is a way he is able to "give back."

"The middle class is getting hurt the hardest and since I have the time now, I can help maybe alleviate some of the stress and pressures" some families are feeling, he said.

Monday was to be one of the group's longest rides—100 miles from McCook to Holyoke, Colo.

They normally ride about 75 miles per day.

Most nights, the cyclists stay in churches or high schools. Overnight Monday, they were scheduled to stay at Holyoke's First Christian Church where they had a dinner followed by a presentation about their cross-country experience.

Monday marked day 41 of the 72-day trip, and they were right on schedule, according to the website, where the cyclist group can be tracked.

Seven other cyclist groups are also riding cross country, all with the same goals in mind.

The Bike & Build mission statement is: "Through fund-raising, Bike & Build raises money for and awareness of affordable housing efforts. Events act as a catalyst to build homes, foster the spirit of service and empower young adults...mile by mile, house by house."

Since the non-profit organization formed in 2003, Bike & Build has contributed \$1,643,145 to housing groups.

So far, the Providence to San Francisco cyclists have raised \$154,083.

Kraft noted that communities across the U.S., especially along their routes, are invited to apply for affordable housing grants from \$2,000 up to \$10,000. The riders themselves make the grant selections.

McCook received one such Bike & Build grant last year.

For those who want to learn more about Bike & Build and its grant program, see their website at: bikeandbuild.org



Billfold of local man found

The riders also provided some good fortune to an Imperial man on Monday.

Kraft said he was pedaling along, about 40 miles east of Imperial, when he spotted a billfold along the side of the road.

"I just figured it was someone's in the group. We're always dropping things," he said.

However, when he opened it up, he saw the license identifying Bryan Dockery of Imperial.

While passing through Imperial, Kraft left the billfold off at the Imperial Police Department.

Dockery was contacted by Sgt. Rob Browning and said his billfold was returned to him at A.K. Acres south plant, where he works.

Dockery said he was returning home from McCook Sunday, when he had to stop near the former Perry Grain facility because his wife was not feeling well. His billfold was in his pocket and it must have fallen out, he said.

"I just thought it was somewhere in the house," Dockery said.

"If I hadn't found it in a few days, I would have been calling the bank," he said.

The billfold still had a small amount of cash in it, as well as his debit card.