

LOS ANGELES

Cyclists Triumph Over Adversity

Activists: Inaugural AIDS/LifeCycle raises \$4.4 million. Suit had sought to block ride.By JEFFREY L. RABIN
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After a week of triumph and tragedy, 670 cyclists rode into Los Angeles on Sunday, ending a 600-mile trek to raise money for HIV and AIDS services and educational programs.

The inaugural AIDS/LifeCycle was born last fall out of a falling-out between two nonprofit agencies and the promoter of the California AIDS Ride, Los Angeles-based Pallotta TeamWorks.

The Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation created their own ride because they thought Pallotta devoted too much of the funds raised to marketing and operations, rather than to the two groups and their programs. Pallotta sued to block the AIDS/LifeCycle ride, but a Los Angeles Superior Court judge in January ruled that the dueling events could go forward. The ninth California AIDS Ride, sponsored by AIDS Project Los Angeles and produced by Pallotta, will be June 2-8 with an estimated 1,100 participants.

The controversy significantly dampened participation in this year's bicycle journey. The two rides combined will draw fewer than 1,800 participants, compared with 2,700 riders in the single event last year. The organizers of last week's AIDS/LifeCycle ride said their event raised more than \$4.4 million in donations.

The AIDS/LifeCycle got off to a difficult start Monday after leaving San Francisco. Shortly after lunch, one participant died of an apparent heart attack on a hill along the San Mateo County coast near San Gregorio State Beach.

But on Sunday, after traveling 65 miles from their last campsite in Ventura, the cyclists drew cheers as they rode the final segment together and attended a ceremony to celebrate their achievement and pay tribute to people who have died of AIDS-related diseases.

The event attracted people from all walks of life, ranging in age from 18 to 71. Each participant was expected to raise at least \$2,500. A contingent of New York riders distinguished themselves by wearing green crowns modeled after the Statue of Liberty affixed to their bicycle helmets.

Jesse Dubler, 19, of Los Angeles rode despite being unable to hear traffic or fellow riders along the state's highways. He hopes to create a team of deaf riders next year.

"I'm riding because I had an experience--a 'scare'--that had me sympathize with HIV-positive people," Dubler wrote in response to a reporter's written questions. "I know this is one of the best ways to raise funds and promote awareness."

Ben Goldstein, 53, rode with a group known as the Positive Pedalers, people who have HIV or AIDS, who led the cyclists down Santa Monica Boulevard to the closing ceremony in West Hollywood. Goldstein has been HIV-positive with symptoms for more than 20 years and he has had AIDS for six years.

"I feel like I was going to climb over my own kind of Mt. Everest doing this trip from San Francisco to L.A.," he said. "It was my way of saying no to the virus."

Goldstein said he rode to support the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, which has helped pay for his medications, and to maintain awareness of the health crisis. More than 47,000 people live with AIDS in California, and an additional 94,000 to 130,500 are living with HIV.

Rabin participated in the ride in honor of his brother, Neil, who died of AIDS-related complications in December.

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