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CLIMATE CONTROLLED

Team Sycamore back from success at Climate Ride Midwest

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Monrovia class focuses on enjoying exercise and getting results

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Bloomington class offers dancing and doulas

Members of Team Sycamore include Robert Meitus, Sheryl Woodhouse Keese, Brian Keese, Jeff White, Bill Brown, Legene White, and Marcia Veldman

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COURTESY PHOTO

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By Seth Tackett

Sheryl Woodhouse Keese's 300-mile climate conference on wheels was everything the development director for the Sycamore Land Trust expected and much, much more.

"It was a very good experience," Woodhouse Keese said.

She and six other cyclists participated in the first-ever Climate Ride Midwest in September, where they navigated their bicycles on a four-day trek through Michigan, Indiana and Illinois to raise money and awareness for climate change.

The team raised over $25,000. After overhead, Sycamore Land Trust received just over $13,000, while Climate Ride benefited with close to $3,500. Sycamore Land Trust riders Robert Meitus and Jeff White raised $5,003 and $4,200 respectively to earn green Climate Ride jerseys for being among the top ten fundraisers of the entire Climate Ride Midwest.

Other members of the team include Brian Keese, Bill Brown, Legene White and Marcia Veldman.

The cyclists rode for over 100 beneficiary organizations. Woodhouse Keese met riders who were raising funds for Alliance for the Great Lakes, Miles of Trees, Citizens Climate Lobby and the Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition, just to name a few.

"While I was inspired by all of the organizations on Climate Ride," Woodhouse Keese said, "I was reminded through the Alliance for the Great Lakes how fortunate we are to live in this region, which holds 20 percent of world's fresh water, and how critical it is for us to protect these lakes."

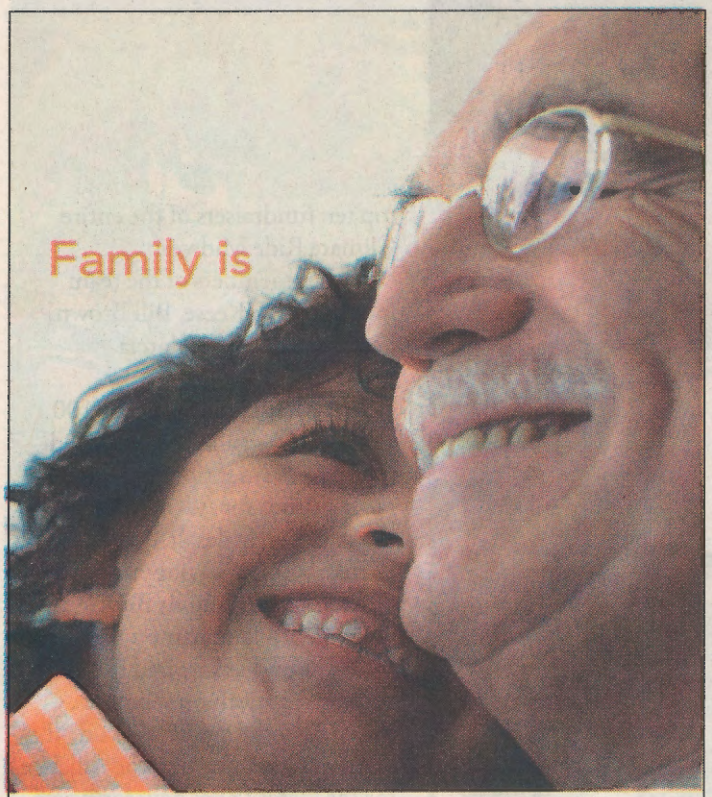
As far as how the actual ride went, the training in and around Bloomington paid off for Woodhouse Keese and her team.

"It was great," Woodhouse Keese said. "It was such a wonderful experience. After training in southern Indiana, southwest Michigan felt flat. Not completely flat, but the hills there don't compare to what we trained on here. The scenery was idyllic, by Lake Michigan, through the woods, past farms where pumpkins were growing. It was just a really pretty ride.

"Even though there were long mileages some days, it was easy riding compared to training around here."

Another part of the experience that Woodhouse Keese enjoyed was the presentations that each organization gave after the first day of the ride.

"It was like a rapid fire introduction to all of the different



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Marcia Veldman and Legene White decide whether to go the short route or the long route. They choose 72 miles.

organizations that received funds," Woodhouse Keese said. "It was really fun. Everybody who was listening had ridden their bikes 55 or 60 miles that day. It was meant to be informative, but also fun and lighthearted.

"When I made that statement, that for each dollar donated Sycamore is able to save 10 dollars worth of land and what that converted to for land saved for what the Climate Ride team was bringing home, people cheered. It was very exciting."

After the first day was in the books and before the presentations began, the riders let their hair down and turned into kids at a summer camp.

"It was warm enough that you could enjoy the water, and people were just out in the lake, almost giddy," Woodhouse Keese said of the riders' impromptu swim in Lake Michigan. "People were happy they made it on the first day, and people were just riding and jumping in the waves.

"It was a really good time and it was fun to see all of these grownups frolicking in Lake Michigan. That was a nice scene."

After the wonderful experience had by all the riders and the money raised for the land trust, the race could become an annual event for Sycamore.

"Everybody on our team was excited to be there," Woodhouse Keese said. "I think people found it to be a really enriching and delightful experience. It was a nice vacation, too.

"Most of the team did the Hilly Hundred together afterwards and continue to ride together. It was very satisfying from a personal level."

Those looking to join Team Sycamore in 2015 can attend a meeting on Jan. 29 at the Monroe County Public Library. The meeting is in room 1B and starts at 7 p.m. Woodhouse Keese will give a presentation on what the land trust does and will provide information on how people can get involved.