

# Cycling for Sycamore: Team hitting the road on fundraising ride to help land trust

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They come from all walks of life and range in age from 32 to 65. But all 13 of them have contributed in one way or another to the Sycamore Land Trust, and they are all taking time out to ride 300 miles from Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Chicago.

The four-day ride Sept. 27-30 is one of several trips offered by Climate Ride, a nonprofit group that organizes charitable events to raise awareness and financial support for sustainable and environmental causes. There are currently 100 beneficiaries, including Sycamore Land Trust, listed on the group's website.

The Bloomington team, Team Sycamore, currently is raising money. Each rider needs to raise at least \$2,800 in order to participate. Even though a couple of the riders haven't yet reached the minimum fundraising goal, the team is No. 1 in fundraising for the Midwest ride. Currently, six of the riders 68237885 Doug Dayhoff, Malcolm Dalglish, Robert Meitus, Tom Zeller, Marcia Veldman and Jeff White are listed in the top 10 in fundraising.

"We're just really proud of them, knowing that they are the top fundraisers for the Midwest ride," said Katrina Folsom, communications director for Sycamore Land Trust.

The group has already raised more than \$43,000, with a goal of raising \$60,000. After the first \$20,000 was raised, an anonymous donor matched that amount. Those matching funds will be used for the Beanblossom Creek Conservation Area that was recently established by the land trust. Folsom said that the matching money will be used to help pay for trails, parking lots and signs in the area for Sycamore's preserves within the conservation area, making the preserves more accessible to the public.

"From our standpoint, it's a good fundraiser, and letting people know about us is really powerful stuff," Folsom said.

"Last year was the first year we did it," said Sheryl Woodhouse Keese, who asked other area residents to participate after her experience participating in the AIDS Life Cycle ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 2010.

"I loved everything about the experience," Woodhouse Keese said, adding that when she saw the Climate Ride added a Midwest option, she "jumped right on it." At the time, she was the development director for Sycamore Land Trust, so bicycling to raise funds for the trust made perfect sense. Last year, seven riders rode the 300 miles and raised \$25,000. Woodhouse Keese said last year's ride "really bonded people together and to the organization" because it was "challenging, fun and had a meaningful outcome."

Woodhouse Keese said some of this year's participants will ride through the Beanblossom Creek Nature Preserve area on Sunday as they prepare for the ride. "We train on all these hills, and it makes the route in Michigan seem pretty easy," she said, adding that the route includes vistas of Lake Michigan, Indiana Dunes and quaint towns.

Legene White participated in last year's ride and is excited about the coming trip. "Last year, we had a great spirit about us," White said. "Everybody knew us, and we were like a known entity." She and Woodhouse Keese expect that to be even more so this year, since the top 10 riders receive special green jerseys to wear, making Team Sycamore stand out even more.

"We are really going to be Climate Ride royalty," White said.

Besides riding between 56 and 88 miles each day, participants also attend an informal gathering each night. The first night, representatives from each of the teams give a five-minute talk about their group that includes photos and a PowerPoint presentation. "It was a really cool learning experience," White said, adding she was amazed how much you can learn in that short of a time. The next two nights, special speakers talk to the group about some aspect of global climate change or environmental concerns.

White said that besides preparing physically for the ride and raising the money, the members must also figure out how to transport themselves and their bikes to Grand Rapids and then make plans for transportation back to Bloomington from Chicago. "It's not just all fun and games. It takes a lot of thought and expense to manage it and get there and do it," she said. The whole process takes six days, which means the team members must take vacation days to participate.

"These are people who are busy people, and they are committed enough to this concept to do this," White said. "It really stems from we're all concerned about climate change and environmental change."

A new member for this year's ride is Tom Zeller, one of the founding members of Sycamore Land Trust. "For me, personally, it's a challenging goal for this year," he said, adding that he started riding 15 miles a day and has been working all summer to increase his mileage. He recently rode the 100-mile Wabash River Ride and is now more confident that he can handle the Midwest ride.

Besides helping him get in better physical shape, Zeller believes another bonus to participating has been getting to know the other riders. "I have this new group to ride with who are all really, really fun," he said. "And we support Sycamore Land Trust."

Zeller is quick to point out that money given to Sycamore Land Trust is well used, adding, "For every \$1 I would give, they acquire protection for \$7 worth of land" through in-kind and matching grants as well as specialty license plate fees.

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