

HES students bolster Ride to Thrive cyclists with snacks, drinks, and encouragement

BY PATTY MAHONEY | OCTOBER 19, 2018

After what seemed like days of rain, the sun came out last Sunday—as did the cyclists and students from Hildreth Elementary School—for the Healing Garden’s fourth annual Ride to Thrive fundraising event. In fact, it was a picture-perfect fall day for the participating cyclists, there to ride 15, 30, or 60 miles through the Nashoba Valley to help raise money for the Healing Garden’s various programs that support those affected by cancer. And they were encouraged by a cadre of fourth- and fifth-grade students from HES who stood excitedly in the crisp autumn air to cheer them on by holding signs and handing out snacks.

The students were part of the HES Leadership Initiative, a group led by Scott Mulcahy, associate principal at HES. Each month, fourth- and fifth-graders are invited to join a special community outreach initiative. Mulcahy said students can join at any point during the initiative, when they feel inspired or connected to a particular effort. His only request is that once they start an initiative they see it through to its completion. Some initiatives are student-inspired, while others are directed by Mulcahy; but with all of them, the students take charge. “It’s really important for the school to connect with different organizations, especially within Harvard,” he said.

Mulcahy said he wanted to model community service for his students by actually cycling in the event himself. Would a 30-mile cycle keep him home on the couch instead of at school the next day? Mulcahy, a past Ironman and marathon competitor, laughed and said, “I’ll be there and hopefully not too sore.”

More than 40 students helped make personalized signs for the cyclists, and 13 families signed up to run water stations in Lancaster and Littleton. Davio Barbosa, a fourth-grade student at HES, brought his parents and older brother to the water station in Lan-

caster. Davio’s mother said her son was excited to join the leadership initiative and came home asking his family to participate.

“It’s important for us and our home culture to promote volunteering,” said Davio’s mother, Bonnie Barbosa. The family signed on for three one-hour shifts.

The Barbosa family ran the water station with fifth-grader Siena Cataudella and her friend Fiona Boutelle, a seventh-grade student at the Bromfield School. Fueled by Munchkins and granola bars, the trio held handmade signs and offered approaching cyclists refreshments. Fiona gave up what would have been a relaxing Sunday of reading books to be



Davio Barbosa hands Dana Koch a sandwich as Tim Mahan looks on.
(Courtesy photo)

at the water station, and the cyclists who stopped by for replenishment voiced their appreciation.

'We need this'

"We need this," said rider Tony Victor, referring to the peanut butter sandwich Siena gave him. Victor, who lives in Acton, was accompanied by Tim Mahan of Groton. Victor stressed the importance of stopping and eating during a cycle, something his friend Mahan often forgets to do. The duo were at mile 43 of their 60-mile ride. "Tell them we did 66 miles," joked Victor. This was Victor's second year participating in the Ride to Thrive and Mahan's first time. Mahan said his wife Diane, a cancer survivor, goes to the Healing Garden every week for acupuncture. "She loves going there," he said. "And she hates needles!" Mahan expressed his gratitude to the Healing Garden and its programs that he said do so much good for so many people. Will he be back on his bike next year for this event? "I'll keep doing it until my legs don't work," he said.

Great day for a cycle

Both men agreed it was a great day for a cycle, despite being a bit chilly when they started out that morning. "It was 35 degrees but who's counting?" said Victor. The temperature had warmed up to the mid-50s by the time they reached the rest stop. "It's

all downhill from here," said Mahan, as he let Davio fill up his water bottle. The men greeted fellow cyclist Dana Koch and set out to the finish line back at the Healing Garden. Koch, who lives in Stow, is husband to Meg Koch, the executive director of the Healing Garden. He has been doing the ride since its inception four years ago and marveled at its success. "When we started, we hoped it would turn into a significant fundraising event, but we had no idea how much it would grow," he said.

More than 75 riders participated this year and raised about \$52,000—money which helps pay for programs like cooking and movement classes offered at the Healing Garden. Clients pay on a sliding scale—based on what they feel they can afford, and the difference is made up by events like the Ride to Thrive. As for the student leadership initiative, its members are concluding this month's effort with a family movie night. The film "Minions" will be shown Oct. 19 at 6:30 p.m. in the HES cafeteria. Admission is free but donations are welcome and will be given to classrooms affected by hurricanes Florence and Michael. Next month's leadership initiative: Veterans Day, which includes a student-run breakfast and ceremonial tribute for Harvard veterans. The students will also write personalized letters to veterans, thanking them for their service.



From left: HES students Davio Barbusa, Siena Cataudella, and Fiona Boutelle encourage riders with their signs.

(Courtesy photo)