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Gran Fondo NJ scores big for charities in 2014

By Kevin Coughlin

Five nonprofits received sizable donations from this year's cycling event in Morristown.



Cyndi Steiner from the New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition receives donation from Bill Ruddick and Marty Epstein. Photo courtesy of Gran Fondo NJ.

This year's **Gran Fondo NJ**¹ drew a record number of cyclists—and contributed a record amount to charity.

Five nonprofits each received \$12,500.

"It is the most rewarding and emotional part of the event. I never expected that the event would generate so much money and I am very happy and proud to help support these worthy organizations," said **Marty Epstein**, co-founder of the Gran Fondo NJ and owner of **Marty's Reliable Cycle**².

This year's charity recipients, **back from last year**,³ were The Seeing Eye Inc., Grow It Green Morristown, Homeless Solutions Inc. and Sustainable Morristown.

The **New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition**⁴, which has advocated for cyclist- and pedestrian concerns during renovations to the George Washington Bridge and Route 35 near the Shore, was added in 2014.

"Since we are a young, small organization, the donation will allow us to increase our capacity; we will use the funds to hire a part-time communications manager," said **Cyndi Steiner**⁵, executive director of the coalition.

Steiner served as grand marshal of the 2014 Gran Fondo NJ, which drew more than 2,000 cyclists to Morristown in September for a day of **endurance rides**⁶ ranging from 18- to 107 miles. This was year four for the event, which is patterned after rides in Europe.

"To be there at the finish with many riders who had never participated in an event like this was gratifying," said Steiner, a former bicycle racer.

"I could see how proud they were of the accomplishment, whether it was 18 miles or 107 miles. [Our coalition] has the ultimate goal of getting more people riding, and the Gran Fondo NJ is an excellent launch pad for new riders, so being there to see this happen was incredible."



HERE THEY COME! The Gran Fondo NJ 2014. Photo by Katharine Boyle for Morristown

The Gran Fondo also stressed sustainability. Working with Sustainable Morristown, organizers diverted 90 percent of the wastes generated by the event away from landfills and into recycling and composting facilities, according to **Bill Ruddick**, the Fondo's executive director.

Samantha Rothman, co-founder of Grow It Green Morristown, said the Fondo donation will go toward her nonprofit's \$200,000 campaign for improvements to the Early Street Community Garden, and also will help support the addition of Grow It Green's first executive director.

"We're excited to announce that Gran Fondo NJ is the first title sponsor of the Grow Early Campaign - their name will be placed on the public bicycle repair station that we have planned for the new garden," Rothman said.

Jim Kutsch, president of The Seeing Eye, said the Fondo donation to his organization "will go directly to support the breeding, raising, and training of Seeing Eye dogs and training people who are blind to safely use and care for those dogs."

The Seeing Eye trains about 260 blind people from the U.S. and Canada every year.

"We rely on recurring support from many donors to meet that need and we are delighted that our partnership with the Grand Fondo NJ has continued dating back to the first Gran Fondo NJ," Kutsch said.

In addition to donations from the Gran Fondo, participating nonprofits have created their own fund drives around the event and raised more than \$600,000 for their organizations over the years, Epstein said.

MORE ABOUT THE GRAN FONDO NJ⁷

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