



More than 2,000 ride for fourth annual Gran Fondo in Morristown

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MORRISTOWN – More than 2,000 riders participated in the annual Gran Fondo NJ on Sunday, the fourth year the bike marathon has made its way through Morristown.

The fundraiser event attracted casual cyclists along with well-trained endurance athletes, to ride for a good cause — or rather, several good causes, including Sustainable Morristown, Homeless Solutions, Grow It Green Morristown, New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition and The Seeing Eye.

Since its founding three years ago, the Grand Fondo NJ has raised more than \$400,000 for local charities, and Sunday's record number of participants will deliver thousands of dollars more to the non-profits, Marty Epstein, one of the event's organizers, said.

"This one is our biggest one yet," said Epstein, who is owner of Marty's Reliable Cycles.

Epstein and Bill Ruddick organized the bike marathon as a way to highlight scenic areas of New Jersey, fundraise for local organizations and promote sustainable lifestyles.

Mass-participation cycling events have been incredibly popular in Europe for decades and are beginning to gain momentum in the United States, according to [GranFondoGuide.com, which collects information about such races](#). In 2009, there were just a handful of events, but by 2014 there are well over 125 in the United States, the site states.

Interest has steadily climbed in the Gran Fondo NJ, which features four routes riders can choose from, ranging from 18 to 107 miles, all beginning and ending on Speedwell Avenue, Epstein said. Afterward, there is a party with music, food and giveaways, he said.

Paul Warren, and his nephew, Ed, rode the 42-mile "Piccolo Fondo," which they found "a bit hilly."

Paul Warren, who lives in Tennessee, found out about the Gran Fondo NJ through his local bicycle club just last week. He said the timing worked out perfectly, since this weekend he would be driving back home after dropping his son off at college in Maine.

"I've done a lot of these rides and I really liked this one. I'm glad we came," he said.

Jeff McIntyre did the "Medio Fondo," a 62-mile ride that featured two timed hill climbs and many scenic county roads. In 2012, the route was named by Bicycling Magazine as one of "The 50 Best Rides in America," [according to the Gran Fondo NJ website](#).

"It was a really great and enjoyable experience — it was a ride through farmlands, wooded areas and nice neighborhoods," the Branchburg resident and new cyclist said. "The climbs were challenging, though."

The most popular trek, by far, is the 107-mile ride to the Delaware River and back, Epstein said.

"It's really a beautiful ride. I know it's one that riders will train for and gear up for because it's the end of the season," Epstein said of the route, which includes four timed hill climbs. "There are a lot of teams and clubs riding here today, including those from New Jersey, some from Chicago and even from Puerto Rico."

Cyndi Steiner, this year's grand marshal, said, "We couldn't have asked for more perfect weather" and Morristown "couldn't be a more perfect place" to host a cycling event.

Steiner, who is executive director of [the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition](#), praised the municipality's efforts in recent years to create an environment that is friendlier to pedestrians, a term she said encompasses not just walkers, but bikers, roller-bladers, skateboarders, runners, wheelchair-bound individuals, utility workers, landscapers and contractors.

Since being named executive director of the organization in 2012, the Montclair resident has been advocating to make streets safer across New Jersey. The state

"experiences a disproportionate number of pedestrian injury crashes and fatalities compared to the nation as a whole," [according to the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety](#).

This year the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition has focused its efforts on pushing for a safe passing law — a requirement that drivers leave enough room for bicyclists when passing them — since New Jersey is the only state in the northeast without one, she said.

In June, the state Assembly adopted [a bill to require drivers to give at least four feet of clearance when passing bicyclists](#). The state Senate has not yet passed a similar bill.

"Cyndi was selected as grand marshal because she's accomplished so much for cycling and pedestrians to advance their rights," Epstein said.

He said Steiner "helped lead the charge" [to bring bike lanes to a stretch of Route 35](#) between Bay Head and Island Beach State Park, and to incorporate pedestrian safety enhancements for the George Washington Bridge's walkway as part of an [an upcoming \\$1.03 billion project to replace the bridge's suspender ropes](#).

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