

local news

Terry Bonnett will never be the same after losing two lovers to AIDS.

"Even if we found a cure today, it couldn't undo the pain and sense of loss," says the 43-year-old Portland man, who has himself been living with HIV for nearly 10 years.

Both partners, meanwhile, died at the age of 43.

"Turning 44 [in November] will be a milestone for me," says Bonnett, who works for the Multnomah County Health Department.

But growing a year older isn't Bonnett's only act of empowerment over this disease. He's literally taking to the streets—on his bike—along with an estimated 1,000 others expected to take part in the first Ride for a Reason, a four-day, 200-mile bike trek designed to raise funds for HIV/AIDS service organizations in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia.

The international fund-raiser, slated for Aug. 14-17, was initially a two-route event, encompassing a Portland-to-Seattle leg and a Vancouver, B.C.-to-Seattle portion, with everyone meeting in the Emerald City.

According to Ride for a Reason officials, the Portland-to-Seattle route has been axed for cost-effectiveness purposes, though Portland participants will be bused up to Vancouver, B.C., to join with others for the ride to Seattle.

Ride for a Reason's concept was developed and nurtured by representatives from six community-based HIV/AIDS service groups in the Pacific Northwest and Canada.

Oregon's Ride for a Reason sponsoring agency is Cascade AIDS Project, a not-for-profit organization that is the state's largest provider of nonmedical services to people affected by HIV and AIDS.

Ride for a Reason participants are expected to raise a minimum of \$1,500 each in pledges. Fifteen percent of the proceeds will be granted to HIV/AIDS service agencies throughout British Columbia, Oregon and Washington, while the remaining 85 percent will support the work of sponsoring agencies: CAP; Washington state's Bailey-Boushay House, Northwest AIDS Foundation, Chicken Soup Brigade and People of Color Against AIDS Network; and B.C.'s AIDS Vancouver.

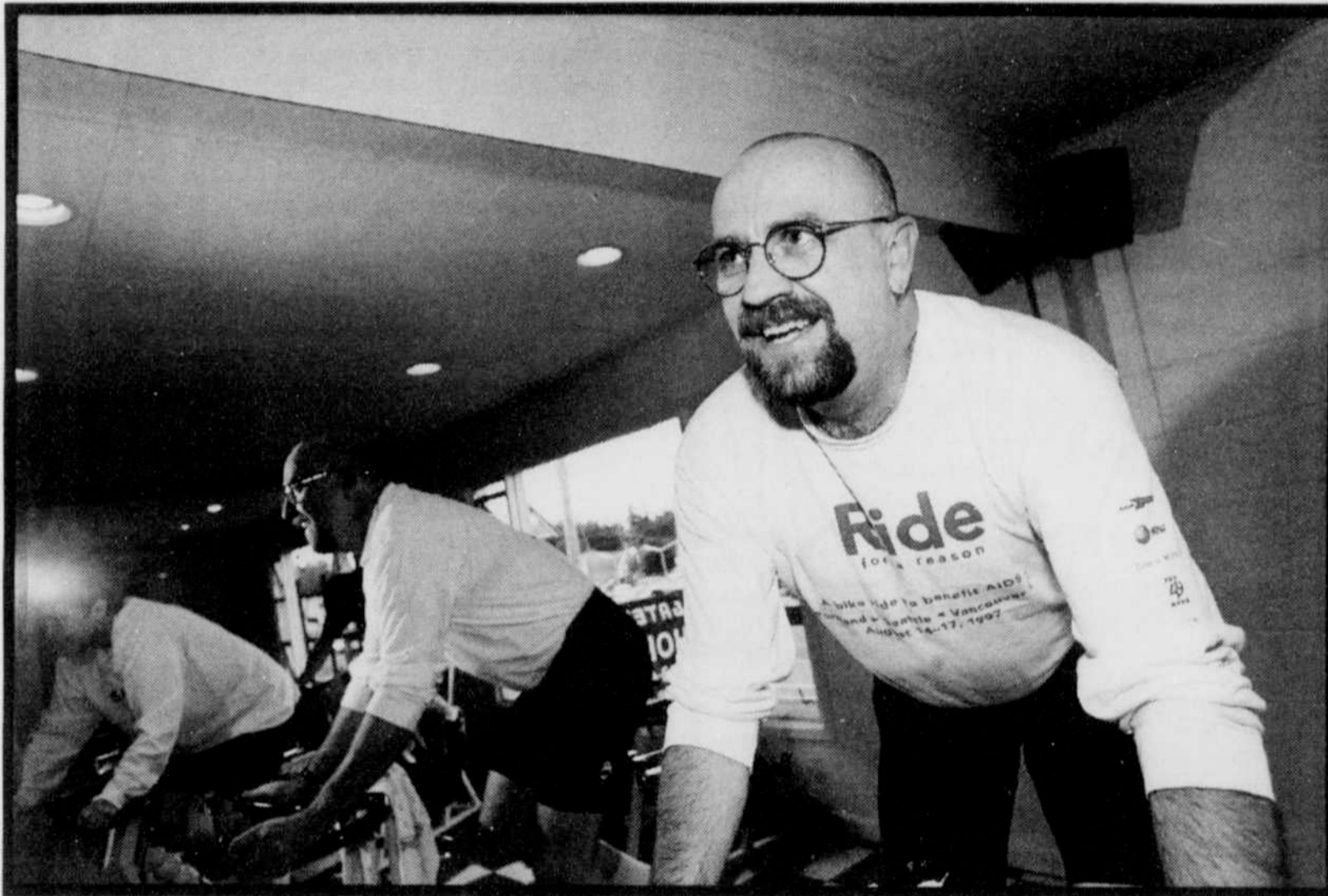
Three-time Tour de France champion Greg LeMond is Ride for a Reason's official spokesman—though cyclists of all abilities are encouraged to join the event, which features a rolling, scenic route at a relatively leisurely 50-miles-per-day pace.

"It's a ride, not a race," stress organizers, who

Riding for a reason

Cyclists will pedal from Vancouver, B.C., to Seattle to raise funds for HIV/AIDS service organizations

by Inga Sorensen



Rider Terry Bonnett at his spinning class with riding partner Pat Foley (left corner)

will create "mobile villages" along the way for riders to rest and enjoy entertainment. Meals, beverages, bike support, hot showers, snacks, massages, relief vans and transportation for personal belongings will be provided throughout the trip.

Riders share their game plans

I'm taking spinning classes and try to bike at least three times a week," says Bonnett, adding that his primary fitness activity—until now, that is—has been vigorous country western dancing.

"Which has given me a strong cardiovascular system and muscular legs, which will be good for this," he laughs.

Bonnett and a co-worker who is a 10-year survivor of breast cancer plan to do the ride together.

"It still makes me so emotional when I think about how I'm still here though I've lost so many," he says. "It feels good to be able to make a difference."

In addition to crafting an exercise regimen, Bonnett says he's attempting to eat more regularly to keep his energy level up.

"Carbos, fruits and veggies—and lots of water. It's really important to stay hydrated," he says.

As for fund raising, Bonnett says he's moving at a healthy pace, collecting pledges ranging from \$5 to \$250. "My co-workers at the health department have been wonderful," he says.

Portland architect Tim Richard, 37, is trying to figure out how to plaster a tortoise, and a hare, to his helmet.

"To reflect how I'm feeling each day of the ride," he half kids.

If you were at the Pride parade, you may have

spotted Richard—he was the guy on the bike with the iguana stuck to his helmet—a construct conceived during his involvement in the recent California AIDS Ride IV, which had cyclists churning out a serious 100 miles per day as they pedaled from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Richard says despite the rigorous schedule, "there were lots of colorful things—costumes and helmet decorations."

He adds, "I thought it would be fun to do some of that with Ride for a Reason."

Richard, who is an avid hiker, cross-country skier and cyclist, says he's looking forward to this event "being a fun social activity that does something positive."

He adds, "I don't really know anyone who has personally been affected by AIDS, and I have to tell you I feel a little delinquent because I haven't been involved. I thought this would be a good opportunity to change that."

In 1986, Kathy Belge, now 31, walked from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., as part of a national peace march promoting nuclear disarmament.

"Maybe that tells you a little something about myself," says Belge, a case manager for Roots and Branches, a Portland-based organization which provides services to sexual minority youth. "I love biking and all that."

Couple that with Belge's desire to help transform the world into a better place and it's no surprise she committed to Ride for a Reason (though she professes disappointment over the cancellation of the Portland-to-Seattle leg).

Belge currently carries a caseload of 15 young people whom she meets with regularly.

She tries to bike to work a couple times a week, "and since I travel around to see my clients, I get in maybe 18 or 20 miles [on those] days."

As for her pledges, she says, "Most of the people I know don't have much money, but it's been easier to raise the \$1,500 than I thought it would be. I have maybe \$200 or \$300 to go."

Like Bonnett, Belge's smallest pledge has been \$5—her largest, from her brother, was \$200.

In order to get in shape, Belge has joined with four others (including one person living with HIV) to launch an informal team which meets for training runs.

"Fifty miles a day over four days shouldn't be much of a problem," she says, adding, "I'm just hoping the tents are waterproof and the food decent."

For more information on becoming a rider or to volunteer for Ride for a Reason, call 1-888-89BIKES.

Karen Sweigert, M.D.
Physician and Surgeon
Obstetrics and
Gynecology
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1130 N.W. 22nd Avenue
Suite 320
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229-7538

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