

“we will” cont.

a sliding scale so people of all income levels can benefit. Riders paid an entrance fee to participate and then raised funds individually by finding sponsors to make donations. The funds raised will be used to subsidize programs of support in their own communities. One rider raised over \$5,000, with another individual raising almost \$4,000.

Organizer, Carol Lundin said, “The weekend was fantastic! People were very happy. I know it’s a good event when people start asking about dates for next year, and how they can volunteer again.”

One of the riders involved was local resident Dana Hyde. Ms. Hyde, not an active bicyclist, created a challenging goal for herself, a special 10-mile power loop. She rode with a cancer survivor, who acted as her coach for the ride. “It was a reverse of the normal survivor/ supporter relationship,” said Ms. Lundin. “In this situation the survivor got to be the supporter. It was a powerful experience for both of them.” Said Hyde, “I lost my sister five years ago to cancer. This community was so supportive and helpful during that time – I just wanted to be able to give back. It was a wonderful experience.” Hyde raised \$700, which will be available to assist local Vernonia residents who want to participate in

healing programs.

The event was planned and organized in Vernonia through an association with local message therapist Heather Lewis, who runs New Day Message Studio, and is the founder of Alethia Holistic Institute, which holds educational workshops and retreats in the Vernonia area. Lewis, who is one of only two certified lymphedema massage therapists in the state of Oregon, has a history of working with cancer patients. She has five clients in Vernonia who are cancer survivors, so she is especially interested in this cause. “Carol contacted me looking for someone in town to help organize events here. We immediately clicked. We started talking about similar goals- promoting awareness and involvement, helping cancer patients regain their health, getting other health care providers involved,” said Lewis. “It appeared the community of Vernonia was ready to serve and support,” said Ms. Lundin.

The story leading up to the “We Will Because We Can” event is an interesting one. Carol Lundin, a breast cancer survivor herself, began working to raise awareness after her sister passed away from cancer in 1991 at the age of 44. Carol, who is from New Hampshire has always been active, “I used bicycling as a way to heal the pain from my loss,”

she said. During a weeklong breast cancer awareness bike ride in the Grand Tetons, she met some women from Eastern Oregon, including Rebecca Hawkins from Pendleton. The two women began talking about creating a cancer awareness/healing/support organization. Together they formed The Breast Cancer Renewal Project and planned their first retreat in Oregon. Carol decided to ride her bike from New Hampshire to Oregon for that first event to increase awareness. She called the ride “I Will Because I Can.”

Almost immediately the organization decided to include all cancer survivors in its mission and changed it’s name to “The Cancer Community Renewal Project.” The project encourages and supports creation of programs based within communities, and involves local businesses, wellness providers, and local organizations. The money raised is intended to stay within the communities being served. Survivors of cancer can apply for help from the organization and receive funds for therapies or exercise programs not covered by insurance. “Patients who have survived cancer surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy... they spend so much time and energy fighting. These programs help them refocus on life, help them get back to living each day,” said Lewis.

In 2004 Carol herself was diagnosed with cancer,



and after receiving treatment, decided she wanted to ride with other survivors. The idea for “We Will Because We Can” was created as a way to do more in partnership with communities. She has been planning it for a year and a half.

Participants began gathering at Cedar Ridge on Friday, May 31, in the evening. There were numerous options available for participants Saturday and Sunday, including a 10-mile family ride on the Linear Trail, a 25 mile out-and-back ride to Keasey, and a 61 or 75-mile loop rides. Afterwards riders gathered on the Vernonia school grounds for a variety of workshops including Jazzercise, body composition, and yoga. Health professionals also spoke on the benefits of massage therapy, and naturopathic medicine.

“One thing that is important about this weekend, is that we involve cancer survivors, as well as supporters,” said Lundin. “This ride is about helping people find strength and resiliency. It’s about trusting enough and allowing yourself to be supported.” One example was a survivor who recently finished treatment. “She was here to be a part of this event, and was only able to ride six miles today. That’s what this is about, building strength, and pushing yourself and being given the support you need.”

Another woman involved in organizing the event was Ellee Thalheimer. She was in charge of logistics and planned the bike routes. “Carol and I shared the organizing duties – she does an amazing job of getting sponsorship and community involvement,” said Ms. Thalheimer. Ellee, a bicycling tour guide by profession said, “The rides went perfectly. I don’t think we had any problems all day. It was amazing!” A group of riders stayed at Cedar Ridge Saturday night, with a dinner and celebration that went into the evening.

“We would like to grow with Vernonia. This is a place that offers us a lot of opportunities – with the new state park, the linear trails, your skills park coming. We would love to come back and do this event again next year, but we also want to start other programs and projects that help serve this community throughout the coming year,” said Lundin. “All of our programs are a little bit different. But when you bring people away to someplace beautiful, that’s when healing happens.”

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