

Fondo from A1

from Italian to “big ride” and traces its origins to 1970 in Cesenatico, Italy. While many serious riders participate in such events to push their limits, they are open to riders of all abilities. As such, Gran Fondos are considered less of a race than an opportunity to bring communities together and experience the joys of riding on the same course as professionals.

“It’s really just about having a good day on the bike,” said event director Mike Ripley. “It’s a group ride.”

Ripley is owner of Mud-slinger Events, a consulting and coordinating company which specializes in running and biking events and has managed the Oregon Gran Fondo in Cottage Grove for about eight years.

Around 70 local vol-

unteers helped run the event, which included the Cottage Grove Bohemia Sunrisers Kiwanis, the Cottage Grove Aqua Lions, the Rotary Club of Cottage Grove and other community members.

Riders began trickling back into town around noon and continued through the day as Plank Town Brewing podium glassware awards were given out to top finishers.

While the Gran Fondo attracted many from out of town, more than two dozen local businesses participated in a “Show Your Race Bib” program in which participants and spectators were encouraged to shop, eat and drink locally.

The promotion program offered discounts and deals to customers who showed their race bibs and spectator cards to participating businesses.

“Since the first time that the Gran Fondo has been



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Cottage Grove local Rick Bondeson crosses the finish line Saturday afternoon, completing the Medio route.

in Cottage Grove, we’re finally starting to see some community buy-in to help create more activity and generate some traffic down there,” said Chamber of Commerce execu-

tive director Travis Palmer. “It’s what we’ve been hoping for all along.”

The Oregon Gran Fondo event has also made a commitment to donate to Project Hero, a nonprofit supporting PTSD awareness and physical and mental health treatment for first responders and military veterans.

The group hosts its own rides nationwide, but Ripley, a veteran himself, was moved to find a way to help its Portland-based affiliate.

“We set up just a third-party fundraising platform that allows all the money we raise just to go straight through to them,” he said. “So it’s nice that it can be earmarked and used for the Portland area and greater Willamette Valley to connect people to cycling.”

Fundraising efforts collected close to \$3,000 for Project Hero, according to Ripley, who hopes that

sponsorship will continue to grow in the coming years.

“I think it was around 20 percent of sponsorship goes back to the fundraising,” he estimated.

Cycler Jesse Rens from Portland included Project Hero as part of his reason for participating.

“I’ve been cycling for quite a long time and it’s always fun to just do events here and there,” he said. “And I’m loosely affiliated with Project Hero.”

Rens is also a veteran and works with the Veterans Affairs office.

“I’ve seen first-hand the positive changes that cycling can have for people,” he said. “It’s really therapeutic; it’s physically good. You automatically have community. So I think for veterans, it’s kind of priceless if we can get them in there.”

Rens cycled the Medio route for Saturday’s event. “The course is really

cool. I’ve never been down here. It’s really beautiful,” he said. “Everybody’s really friendly and it’s a really scenic route, so it’s been fun.”

The community nature of rides like the Gran Fondo is part of what attracts Rens to them.

“It’s fun to see how fast you can do it, but for the most part it’s just like a big group ride that has support. It just makes it more fun,” he said. “It’s a little easier when it’s a group, so it’s a different dynamic that you don’t usually get without going to an event.”

Ripley echoed the sentiment that these events bring a lot of positivity.

“It’s just a good day of getting outside and unplugging,” he said. “That’s what people need more than ever right now.”

On top of the personal benefits, Ripley hoped to see positive local impact.

“These businesses downtown, they need support,” said Ripley, mentioning that he puts on similar events in other Oregon cities. “Communities don’t have nearly as much local support as they used to.”

Exposure, he said, was a big part of energizing a town.

“It puts Cottage Grove on the map,” Ripley said. “We had a couple from the Netherlands last year start their first American experience in Cottage Grove.”

Ripley sees the capacity for exposure like this to give magnetism to the community.

“People see the potential in things and want to make it their own,” Ripley said. “And so I think that’s what’s really cool about Cottage Grove is that people do have the chance to make Cottage Grove their own and that’s a wonderful thing.”

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