



Biking the Rideau for cancer research

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EMC Events - For John Desjardins, the journey with cancer began more than 25 years ago. But in a new fundraising event, it will take a 100-km ride to move the cause forward.

On Sept. 11, more than 280 cyclists will participate in the first annual Ride the Rideau event.

The bike ride, in support of cancer research at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, will follow the Rideau River from Lansdowne Park in Ottawa to downtown Merrickville-Wolford.

A resident of Carlsbad Springs, Mr. Desjardins became involved with the event through his work at Merkely Supply Ltd. His boss, Robert Merkely, is one of the creators of the ride.

"He really got the ball rolling," Mr. Desjardins said.

Along with being an opportunity to get him back into physical shape, Mr. Desjardins said he was eager to participate in a cause so close to his heart.

In 1983, his family doctor noticed an odd mole and sent Mr. Desjardins for testing.

"It was a strange looking thing," he said, which turned out to be a malignant melanoma.

Since it was only at stage one, the mole was removed and Mr. Desjardins was sent home.

"It was, 'We got it, see you later,'" Mr. Desjardins recalled. However, nine years later, another spot turned up on his shoulder, which ended up being stage four melanoma.

By this point, Mr. Desjardins said he was closely monitored by the oncology department at the Ottawa Hospital's Civic campus.

"I got checked out every three months, then that progressed to every six months, then extended to every nine months. But after they found another spot it was back to every three months again."

Less than two years later, the cancer had spread and after finding a lump under his left arm, Mr. Desjardins had all of the lymph nodes in the area removed and underwent radiation treatments and chemotherapy.

Upon receiving a cancer diagnosis a second time, Mr. Desjardins said that his chief emotion was shock.



John Desjardins has been battling skin cancer since 1983. He will be participating in the inaugural Ride the Rideau cycling event to raise money for cancer research at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute.

"It was quite scary," he said.

"We had just started a family at that point, so I was afraid for the future." Fortunately for Mr. Desjardins and his family, the timing was right.

"Had my cancer spread five or six years earlier, (treatments) were not available or completely tested."

But early detection and the level of care he received at the Ottawa Hospital have reduced his fear, he said.

"If you catch these things early enough and keep them from spreading, it's no problem."

Mr. Desjardins will be participating in the non-competitive event with his team, the Brick Peddlers.

Among his work colleagues, while he does not know of others who have had a personal on-going fight with cancer, he said that it is something that quite a few people are touched by.

In preparation for the ride, Mr. Desjardins has worked his way up from a 10-km ride to being able to cycle for 60 km in one shot over the weekend.

Every second night, he rides for 20 km and has lost more than 30 lbs since he began training.

He said that his wife and 17-year-old son are behind him morally and have been helping to fundraise. As of EMC deadline, the Brick Peddlers had achieved 93% of their fundraising goal of \$90,000.

Ride the Rideau kicks off Sept. 11 at Lansdowne Park.

To support the efforts of the riders, including Mr. Desjardins, please visit www.ridetherideau.ca.

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