

Joseph Peña

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“Cycling for life”

Before she started training for the upcoming AIDS Life Cycle, the only bike Jill Sherman-Warne rode was one that didn't move.

Sherman-Warne, 38, teaches a cycling class at a gym in Point Loma. She saw a flyer for the five-day ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles at work and decided it would be challenging and a good cause to ride for.

“I just expect to be emotionally and physically pushed to the limit,” said Sherman-Warne, who has been diagnosed with rheumaty arthritis. “I'm going to be managing some pain, to a certain extent. I'm just going to have to keep telling myself, ‘Come on, you can do it; focus; push it’--all of the things I tell my class.”

The AIDS Life Cycle, a 585-mile bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles will take place June 6-12 and is produced by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center. The cycling event raises funds for research and health services related to HIV/AIDS and aims to increase activism and awareness for the disease. The event was formerly called the California AIDS Ride.

Sherman-Warne, a Mission Bay resident and Native American of the Northern California Hoopa Tribe, said she's drawn to the cause because of HIV/AIDS affects on Native Americans.

“It's difficult for some Native Americans to embrace the reality and deal with it,” said Sherman-Warne, who is also the environmental director for the Pechanga Reservation in San Diego. “Hopefully, by riding, I can inspire someone.”

Sherman-Warne said one of the Hoopa tribe members was diagnosed with AIDS and, though friends and members of his tribe and church embraced him, when he died his family told others he died from cancer.

According to the Web site for the AIDS Life Cycle, the ride provides a reminder that the rate of HIV infection is increasing, particularly in communities of color and in individuals under the age of 25, and that in California alone there are more than 55,000 people living with AIDS, and another 125,000 living with HIV.

Cyclists are required to raise \$2500 in donations for the ride and are expected to provide their own biking equipment and accessories.

Pechanga sponsored Sherman-Warne and a friend, providing them with the \$2500 donation fee.

AIDS Life Cycle provides shipment methods for cyclists who need to ship bikes to the bay area.

Leona Flores, 40, of Oceanside said the ride, her first, will be an emotional one.

Two of Flores' friends died from AIDS when she was living in Laguna Niguel and both of her parents died this year, though not from HIV/AIDS.

"It's going to be cathartic," said Flores. "If I make it out in one piece...it's just going to be grueling emotionally, but it's going to be good working in a community [of riders] and working toward a common goal."

Flores said the memory of her neighbors has pushed her to be active with causes related to AIDS research.

"They [my neighbors] have always been in my heart and on my mind and I've always wanted to give something back or do something and now just seems like the right time," said Flores.

Flores has trained for the ride since November, cycling more than 100 miles a week. She used to ride, or “keep up” as she put it, with her father before he died.

Flores is now working toward her MA in pharmacology at UCSD.

“I was always really interested in how drugs can work together and work against each other and watching my neighbors go through so many different medications really brought it home for me,” said Flores. “I became interested on a different level.”

Bonnie Osborn, a media relations director for the event, said more than 1900 people are registered to participate in the event, though some may fall through at the last minute.

Javier Fernandez, 32 of San Marcos, will make the California ride for the first time. Fernandez, who has had friends infected with HIV and AIDS, rode from Raleigh, N. Car., to Washington, D.C., in 2002 after friends told him about the cause and the California trek.

“There isn’t enough done to help the people [with AIDS] or the organizations connected to [AIDS] research,” said Fernandez. “It’s sad that there are more people involved in such a critical cause.”

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