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Running, cycling for a cause

As temperatures rise, so do the numbers of crusaders who bike to call attention to those in need.

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Jon Holmes, left, and Greg Taylor of Team Will have their jerseys signed by Haley Pasquale, 4, of Aurora at Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center. Haley suffers from anemia. Team Will bikes across the country in honor of Will Kiefert, who died of cancer at 17 months old. (Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post)

Every summer, they come.

They come running along windswept highways shimmering with heat. They bicycle down curling mountain trails and cruise busy interstates, often with hulking motor homes hovering alongside them.

They are grieving parents, amputees, cancer survivors, the elderly refusing to age, animal lovers. They are the committed, the driven and the obsessed, who, braving 18-wheelers, bad weather and flying beer cans, crisscross the nation each summer. Along the way they stop in Colorado with surprising frequency.

They do it for attention and donations, in the hope that some of whatever force propels them is infectious enough that anyone who sees them huffing along will be moved and maybe inspired.

"I like doing

More Info

- [Learn](#) more about Team Will's journey from their official web site.

great things so that people look at me when I'm done, so that other people look at me and think, 'I could do that,' " said Reza Baluchi.

Last year, the 36-year-old Baluchi ran not across but around — literally — the United States, 11,500 miles. In the process he raised money for Children's Hospital in Aurora.

Some people might run 11,500 miles and consider their work finished. Not Baluchi, who ran away from home — literally — at age 9 and hasn't stopped since. Now he's planning to run — not literally — around the world, using a pedal-propelled watercraft to cross oceans.

Baluchi completed his 11,000 miles last winter, beating the country-crossing rush.

In June, Colorado greeted bike-riding amputees, a guy raising money for dog-cancer research, a woman running 200 miles to the Ludlow Massacre site to get attention for labor issues, and two septuagenarians piloting motorized scooters across the country just to prove they can.

Then there's July.

In July come two guys, in kilts, on motorcycles.

They'll be raising money for Moebius syndrome research, and, one imagines, praying the wind doesn't blow.

Moebius syndrome is a neurological disorder that prevents George Read, 5, from smiling, frowning or blinking.

George's father, Colin Read, masterminded Kilts Across America, which took off from Manhattan on June 28 and will wind up tired (and probably chafed) in Los Angeles.

If all this makes it sound like the nation's highways and byways are crowded, they are.

"We crossed paths with (Texas 4000 cyclists) two years ago. They seemed great, signed our banner," said Allan Loucks, who crossed the country in June with Team Will, which stopped in Denver during its quest to raise money for childhood cancer research.

Texas 4000, meanwhile, rides from Austin to Alaska, also for cancer research.

Team Will, named for William Kiefert, who died of cancer before his second birthday, has raised \$60,000 so far, said Ken Kiefert, Will's dad.

Dollar goals not the point

Some of these odysseys get money through sponsors; others ask participants to collect individual sponsors. Still others merely hope for generosity as they pass through town.

Whether these efforts accomplish any of their goals or not doesn't seem to deter the dozens of country-crossers who suit up every summer.

Organizing them is neither easy nor cheap, as Jon Bellona learned.

Bellona was a technician at Brooklyn Recording studios "having a lot of fun," until he went running one day.

Looking at empty sky where the Twin Towers stood, he thought of his friend, Army 1st Lt. Mike Cleary. On Dec. 20, 2005, Cleary became one of the more than 4,100 U.S.



Members of Team Will, from Sacramento, Calif., arrive at Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center in Denver last month. They are, from front, Allan Loucks, Van U'Ren, Jon Holmes and Greg Taylor. (Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post)

service members to die in Iraq.

Bellona, with a cross-country bike ride under his cycling shorts, decided to organize a 4,000-mile run — one mile for each of the U.S. war dead.

Sounds simple enough. But there were routes to plot, runners to recruit, sponsors to court. Along the way, Bellona decided to plant a flag at each mile with a marker bearing the name, age, death date and service branch of the dead. Eventually he had to quit his job to work full time on the run.

"I can't even begin to quantify" the time and money invested, he said.

The investment is one reason fundraising consultant Jill Shelton is wary of such efforts. Uncertainty about how much money gets to charity is another, she said.

"I wouldn't advise anyone to do it (to raise money) — and personally, as a donor I'd be very leery," said Shelton, a vice president at The Miller Group Worldwide in Fort Collins, which advises nonprofits on fundraising.

Teen amputee's turnaround

On a Monday morning last month, a couple dozen people, some leaning on walkers, a couple with artificial legs, one in a wheelchair, stood on the sidewalk outside HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital in Colorado Springs, gazing westward.

Eventually, someone saw what they had been waiting for, and the cry went up: "Here they come!"

At first, they could see only the flashing red and blue lights of the police motorcycles escorting the cyclists. Finally, the crowd made out the very thing that had drawn them: gleaming artificial arms and legs.

One of those legs belonged to 19-year-old Luke Myers of Florissant.

Myers lost his leg in 2003, 16 months after a driver crossed a center line and smashed into a car carrying Myers and his brother and sister. All three were banged up but survived.

The transformation from football player to one-legged 14-year-old left Myers "feeling down."

That summer, Amputees Across America breezed into town, and into Myers' therapy room, and started to change that.

These days, Myers jokes about his artificial leg being a "chick magnet" and brags about being a volunteer firefighter. This fall, he'll go to college to become a prosthetic technician.

But first, there were a couple thousand more miles to pedal.

"Mainly I want to prove to myself I can do it," he said.

Visits of solace and anguish

For Team Will, the visits to kids in hospitals across the country provide both inspiration and anguish.

In bike shorts and bright yellow jerseys, the riders, and Ken Kiefert, tramped through Presbyterian/St. Luke's hospital one June morning.

They met Clay Trewhella, 13, who spent a few minutes with the riders before getting a spinal tap that would update his doctors on his battle against Clay's leukemia.

Kiefert organized the first Team Will ride when his son died.

After untold hours of planning, donations of time and money and sheer exhaustion, Team Will finished that first ride in 2006.

And then, Kiefert said, "I realized we weren't really done. There were still a lot of families going through this."

And so they continue.

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Other crossers

One newspaper story could not possibly contain information on all the country-crossers who come from Colorado, or have or will come through Colorado, this summer. Here are a few more:

- On June 6, **Cary Freels**, right, rode his motorcycle to Coors Field, one stop on his two-wheeled tour of all 30 major-league baseball stadiums in 40 days. Freels' 13,000-mile ride raises money for for LIVESTRONG, The Lance Armstrong Foundation.
- Two University of Denver grads, **Eric Kornacki**, 26, and **Joseph Teipel**, 23, embark this month on a two-year bike trip from Alaska to Argentina. The pair will be raising money for Revision International, which they describe as a nonprofit trying to "create an alternative social contract based upon principles and practices of wisdom that revise the way people relate within society and the way society relates to the environment."
- Denver actor **Jeremy Make** is traveling cross-country on a golf cart. "kART Across America" is designed to, as Make puts it, discover, inspire and expose art across America.
- Denver residents **Larry** and **Laura Newlin** are riding across the country on a tandem recumbent bike. The couple — Larry Newlin is a recently retired Denver International Airport air-traffic controller — took off from Lincoln City, Ore., on May 13 and plan to finish in Virginia on Sept. 1.
- **Brendan McGonigle**, a Massachusetts resident, was scheduled to stop in Denver on Saturday during his cross-country bike ride to end homelessness. Money he raises goes to The National Center on Family Homelessness.
- Grand Junction's **Mark Irvin** will spend a few days on wheels, but he's not going anywhere. Irvin will climb into a shopping cart July 11 and stay there until he raises \$10,000 for muscular dystrophy.