

Peddalling to support Parkinson's research

BY CHARLENE PECK

Every Saturday morning a group of enthusiastic cyclists gather in Parry Sound for an early morning ride on area roads.

On July 15, 16 and 17, these cyclists will be hosting three special Pedalling for Parkinson's rides to raise awareness of a disease that robs Canadians of the ability to enjoy even the simplest of pursuits.

Over the course of the three days, participants will be pedalling approximately 100,000 pedal strokes – one pedal stroke for each Canadian diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

The idea for this new ride arose when friends of the cyclists were diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

"It was a desire to parlay our love for cycling into something we've done for a while – and that's supporting some kind of cause – and this one was a little more personal," says Peter Istvan, Pedalling for Parkinson's organizer.

Over the years he and some of the other Saturday morning riders in town have cycled in "rides for a cause" including the Tour for Kids that helps children attend Camp Oochigeas in Rosseau and two other oncology camps in Ontario. Often, Istvan has also been accompanied on fundraising rides by life-long friend David Newall of Toronto, who thinks Pedalling for Parkinson's supports a terrific cause.

About nine years ago David's father Dr. John Newall, an orthopedic surgeon, was diagnosed with Parkinson's. Now in his early 70s, the former skier, water polo player and "handy kind of guy" spends 60 per cent of his week at his farm property in Creemore and the rest of his time in Toronto where he has a flourishing medical-legal practice.

"Of course, he is no longer oper-

ating or seeing patients but he provides expert advice to the legal community," says David Newall. "He really is an inspiration. You don't hear him complain. Ever."

The son admits sometimes it's hard to watch his father.

"There's a specific way to describe it with Parkinson's when you look down at your feet and say: 'Okay, feet let's go' and they don't do anything, and so he sort of leans forward and starts this stutter step until he gets his gait," says Newall. "But he is brave and continues on leading a full life to the extent that he can."

"He has 100 per cent of mental faculties, though his balance and his mobility are starting to be pretty severely impacted," Newall explains.

"So if we can enjoy our passion and raise money to draw awareness to this neurological disease and raise money that would go towards finding a cure or improving the lives of those with Parkinson's it's a great way to spend our time," says Newall, who'll be pedalling for Parkinson's as a representative of the Newall family.

Funds raised through the new event go to the Parkinson's Society for research, education and support services.

"There is no cure and we don't know what causes Parkinson's," says Karen Boyer, northern community development co-ordinator for the Parkinson's Society of Central and Northern Ontario. "So in our research, scientists across Canada, and obviously (other researchers) around the world, are working on a cure for Parkinson's – each one on a little different aspect."

These, she explains, range from pharmaceutical possibilities to environmental implications and pre-disposing factors such as genetics. The Parkinson's



Society provides grants to scientists with innovative ideas for research.

Neurodegenerative disease

Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative disease. Movement is normally controlled by dopamine, a chemical that carries signals between the nerves in the brain. When cells that normally produce dopamine die, the symptoms of Parkinson's appear. Medication can lessen some symptoms. The most common symptoms include: tremour, slowness and stiffness, impaired balance and rigidity of muscles.

The rate of progression and the severity of symptoms can vary greatly. As a result, proper diagnosis is crucial, yet often difficult to confirm. In fact, there is no diagnostic test that can confirm Parkinson's.

Boyer has nine support groups in her area, including one in Bracebridge. The Parkinson's Society provides training for group facilitators, who are usually someone diagnosed with the disease or their family member. Monthly meetings have educational, social



Submitted photos

Photo left, Peter Istvan of Parry Sound and David Newall of Toronto plan to ride in Pedalling for Parkinson's. Photo right, Marty Martelle, David Bialkowski, Tim Graves and Peter Jones, are some of the local Saturday morning cyclists supporting the Pedalling for Parkinson's event.

and peer support components.

"It's so empowering around the table for people to know that someone else is experiencing something similar to them," says Boyer. "But having said that each person will experience Parkinson's symptoms very individually. There are lots of commonalities but it is still quite individual."

Currently Parry Sound does not have a Parkinson's support group.

Two options are available for

http://psc.r-esourcecenter.com/personalevent/Personal_Event.aspx?c=IXYAd3sPY

Planned routes are July 15: 120 km. from Parry Sound out Highway 124 and back; July 16: 160 km. from Parry Sound to Gravenhurst and back; and July 17: 110 km. from Parry Sound to Rosseau to Minnett and Footes Bay and back to Parry Sound. Start times are 7:30 a.m., rain or shine. Starting locations are being determined.

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