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County roads can be hazardous, bicycle safety programs warn

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

One year after Leamington migrant worker Alberto Tableros was hit by a car and killed while riding his bicycle, two programs are working to make local roads safer for cyclists.

The first is Share the Road Ride, an effort to raise public awareness about creating bike friendly roads.

The second annual event is planned for Oct. 21, and organizers are anticipating more than 100 bike riders to participate.

Last year, the event highlighted Seacliffe Drive as potentially hazardous for migrant workers whose only mode of transportation is a bicycle. It took place just hours before Tableros was killed on Highway 3.

Later that month, Share the Road Ride organizer Tom Omstead drafted a petition, which has now been signed by more than 1,100 supporters. It calls for government to address the safety issue by painting biking symbols and posting signs on key bike routes

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around Essex County. It also asks that some roads be widened to include designated lanes for cyclists.

Omstead spoke about the petition on Oct. 6 from his temporary residence in Canmore, Alta.

"We find in Alberta, there is a lot of awareness about motorists sharing the road with cyclists," Omstead said. "Most of the roads have paved edges for bikers. People are alert to bikers being on the road. When we go back to Essex, the difference hits us like a ton of bricks."

Since Tableros' death, Omstead has worked with County Engineer Tom Bateman to post signs in both Leamington and Ruthven. There is still more that needs to be done in Essex and the rest of the county, Omstead said. Tableros was 46 when he was killed riding home from work on Highway 3 near the intersection with the Graham Side Road in Kingsville. Tableros did not have reflective gear on his bicycle, Ontario Provincial Police officers said. Three

migrant workers have been killed riding their bicycles in the past three years.

This year's ride will begin at Essex town hall and continue 20 kilometres to Cottam and back, highlighting potential hazards on County Road 34.

"That road should be more bike-friendly," Omstead said. "That is the key message- bikers do have a right to be on the pavement. Most motorists know that, but there's always one in a thousand that don't get it."

The second program working to ensure safety for cyclists focuses on educating migrant workers about the rules of the road.

Last July, Leamington's Migrant Worker Community Program teamed up with the town and the Guest Workers' Safety Committee to start a series of bicycle education training workshops.

Co-ordinator Zakaria Chol said the program has reached about 500 workers at 12 greenhouses in Leamington and Kingsville.

The aim of the program is to break down cultural

barriers and educate workers about riding on busy county roads, Chol said. He said many migrant workers don't recognize street signs and are used to riding against traffic, instead of with it

"It's a cultural barrier," Chol said. "It's not because they're not law abiding, it's just because they don't understand."

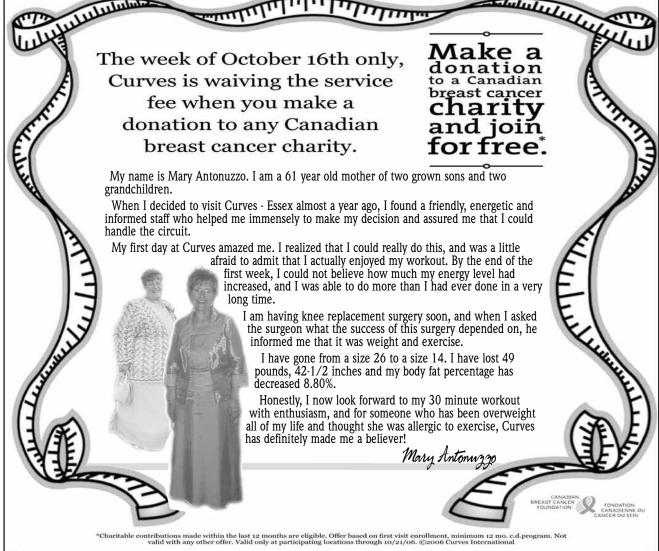
With \$5,000 in funding from the towns of Leamington and Kingsville, the program has secured equipment for the workshops, distributed 2,000 bike safety flyers and produced a TV commercial geared toward migrant workers on CFTV 34.

Chol said the program has also helped get some greenhouse operators on board, who now supply reflectors for bike-riding workers.

"The whole program exceeded our modest expectations," Chol said.

The program will come to an end in November, but Chol said he hopes it can be reintroduced next year.

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