



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

George Hincapie crosses the finish line along with other riders Sunday in Mattamy Homes Tour de Bleu in support of the Markham Stouffville Hospital expansion.

Hospital ride nets \$445,000

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Exhausted and considerably lighter, 43 Tour de Bleu cyclists refreshed and plumped up Markham Stouffville Hospital's expansion fund Sunday.

The cyclists traversed 220 kilometres over six hours, raising \$445,000.

Mattamy Homes' 2011 Tour de Bleu trek from Port Carling to the hospital featured Olympic and Tour de France cyclists Steve Bauer from Canada and American George Hincapie. The peloton included a virtual who's who of Canadian business and medicine, including Mattamy president Peter Gilgan, Markham Stouffville Hospital cardiologist Dr. Joseph Minkowitz, physician Dr. Mike Nowak and radiologist Dr. Michael Steirman.

One of only two riders in Tour de France history to have raced on nine tour-winning teams, Mr. Hincapie was awed by the conditioning of the amateur riders who took part in the fundraiser.

"I do this for a living, but for people with real jobs, it's tougher," he said. "I'm impressed. They covered the 200-plus km well and safely. I enjoyed being part of it."

An 11-time Tour de France cyclist and 1984 Olympic road racing silver medallist, Mr. Bauer deemed the amateurs' performance as "awesome".

Piloting an Argon 18 carbon fibre bike valued at \$7,500, he joked his fellow riders were fitter than he was.

"I love doing this," he said of the annual Mattamy event that raises funds for community health facilities in which the builder operates. "It's a great cause."

Mr. Gilgan, who hosted the entourage at his Muskoka home during the weekend, said Sunday's fundraiser was the company's seventh. Participants are either sponsored or contribute directly. The money raised for Markham Stouffville Hospital is part of a \$1-million Mattamy commitment towards the \$50-million expansion, he said.

HOSPITAL DOUBLING

"There was some huffing and puffing, too," Mr. Gilgan said. "This was the best ride so far. This is a great group of people who share a real passion for what they do."

Medical supply executive Karen Marshall is a rookie rider who had cycled 200 km only once before.

"It's so rewarding," she said. "It feels good to give back to the community."

The ride, under threatening rain clouds, was exhilarating, she said.

"I adore cycling," Ms. Marshall said. "There's such great camaraderie and friendships. The only advice they gave me was to not stop pedalling."

Angela Lin Van Dongen has been cycling

for a decade and has participated in each of the seven Tour de Bleu events.

A typical ride might be around 120 km, she said. "It was a real accomplishment for everyone to cover the distance today. Everyone pushed each other and it's such an incredible way to enjoy the countryside."

Welcoming the riders was hospital foundation chief executive officer Suzette Strong. The riders' efforts accomplished two key initiatives, she said.

They raised important funds and awareness, she said, noting the foundation is pleased Mr. Gilgan and Mattamy chose to support the hospital. Since construction started in December, the foundation is at 66 per cent of its fundraising goal and construction is slightly ahead of schedule.

Markham Ward 4 Councillor Carolina Moretti and Whitchurch-Stouffville deputy mayor Phil Bannon represented the municipalities which the hospital serves.

"To write a cheque is easy, but to give of your time is priceless," Ms. Moretti said of the event and its riders. "Volunteers are the heartbeat of the community."

The hospital expansion, scheduled for completion in 2013, will double the size of the existing facility, Ms. Strong said. In addition to an expanded ER, out-patient clinic, diagnostics, maternity and mental health facility, the project will add eight new operating rooms and 100 patient beds.

Horses help say farewell to beloved vet

Uniformed police equestrian riders stood on guard and an 1800s stage coach carried the casket of Dr. Ralph Watt. It was only fitting.

Tuesday's send-off was for a veterinarian who served York Region for more than 50 years.

Dr. Watt died Aug. 3 at age 81.

His funeral was held at a packed St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Markham.

The Lancaster, Ont., native began his career at the Thornhill Veterinary Clinic in 1960 before moving to Markham to establish his own equine and small animal practice, the Mount Joy Animal Clinic. Most recently, he owned and practised out of the Ballantrae Plaza Veterinary Clinic in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Online forums are filled with tributes, especially to his work with horses. Some horse owners spoke to Dr. Watt as late as the day before his death.

ONLINE TRIBUTES ABOUND

"Each and every one of our horses loved him, he had a special gift with horses, which has also been passed on to his son, Dr. Bruce Watt," reads a post on www.equiman.com by Prima Equestrian of Mount Albert.

"Owning horses is not easy, with it comes sadness at times. One only has to have a horse for a short time to realize this and Dr. Watt was always there for his clients with the best advice and guidance and most important, was someone who cared, doing his best for everyone."

"We trusted our much loved horses in his care completely and all of the foals born at our farm were touched by Dr. Watt. His was the first face along with ours they would see when entering into the world. To not see his friendly kind face walking into our barn will seem empty. Our farm will not be the same without him."

PUBLIC CELEBRATION COMING

Predeceased by his wife, Joanne, Dr. Watt is survived by children Sandy, Bruce and Peggy, grandchildren Stephanie and Kyle, sister Lorna MacLeod, brothers Colan Watt and Donald Watt and many nieces and nephews.

A public celebration of Dr. Watt's life will be held later. Memorial donations to the Markham Stouffville Hospital would be appreciated by the family.

- with files from Jim Thomas

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