

Brothers' grief fuels charity ride around region

BY CAROLINE GRECH
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It started 10 years ago as a way for brothers Kris and Kirk Tobias to clear their heads after the death of their mother.

Only six weeks after Karen Tobias' death from breast cancer at 53, the two men rode with 40 people in the inaugural Ride for Karen cycling fundraiser.

That first event raised \$25,000 — \$15,000 of which was donated by the Markham family.

Ten years later, the ride has grown to include about 450 cyclists, who will take to the streets of York Region, beginning at St. Joan of Arc Catholic High School in Maple, Sept. 11.

The cyclists will travel along roads in western Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The cause is never far from the minds of Kris or Kirk. They also lost their father last July to cancer.

"Cancer doesn't have six degrees of separation. It usually has two degrees of separation. It's the kind of thing people can get behind. We found, over time, that more and more people want to act locally. They want to be involved in something that has local touch points for them," Kris explains.

Whether you are a seasoned cyclist or a casual rider, you have three routes from which to choose: a 25-kilometre cycling challenge; a

100-km ride and a 160-km ride.

After 10 years and much blood, sweat and tears, a whopping \$1.4 million has been raised.

While the race has grown in the past decade, Kris, 43, and Kirk, 39, plan to keep the event a grassroots effort.

Among the things on which they insist is 100 per cent of the money raised goes directly to the cause, which is providing funding to three Ontario camps — Camp Quality, Camp Oochigeas and Camp Trillium — for children battling cancer.

REMEMBER MOM

"We're still a grassroots movement. We bake all the food the riders eat. We still make all their lunches," Kirk explains, adding they are often asked for the recipe to their ginger-snap cookies once riders get a taste. "This is something that is near and dear to our heart, but we couldn't do it without support of organizations like Scotiabank."

Keeping true to the local feel has meant that during the past few years, they've had to secure sponsors who help pay the costs of putting on such a ride. Scotiabank has been on board as a sponsor for three years now.

Another constant that will always remain is the Tobias brothers actually ride each year — no small feat for organizers of a major event.

They credit their wives, Sue and

Paula, and good friends for taking the reigns on race day to let them ride with participants.

The event is truly a labour of love for the brothers and their family and friends and, while it has grown, they don't have any aspirations to expand the ride to thousands of participants because they say they don't want to dilute the experience.

For Vaughan resident and cancer survivor Alfio Magnanelli, the ride is marked in his calendar each year.

After reading about the ride in The Vaughan Citizen in 2005, Mr. Magnanelli felt this was an event in which he should participate.

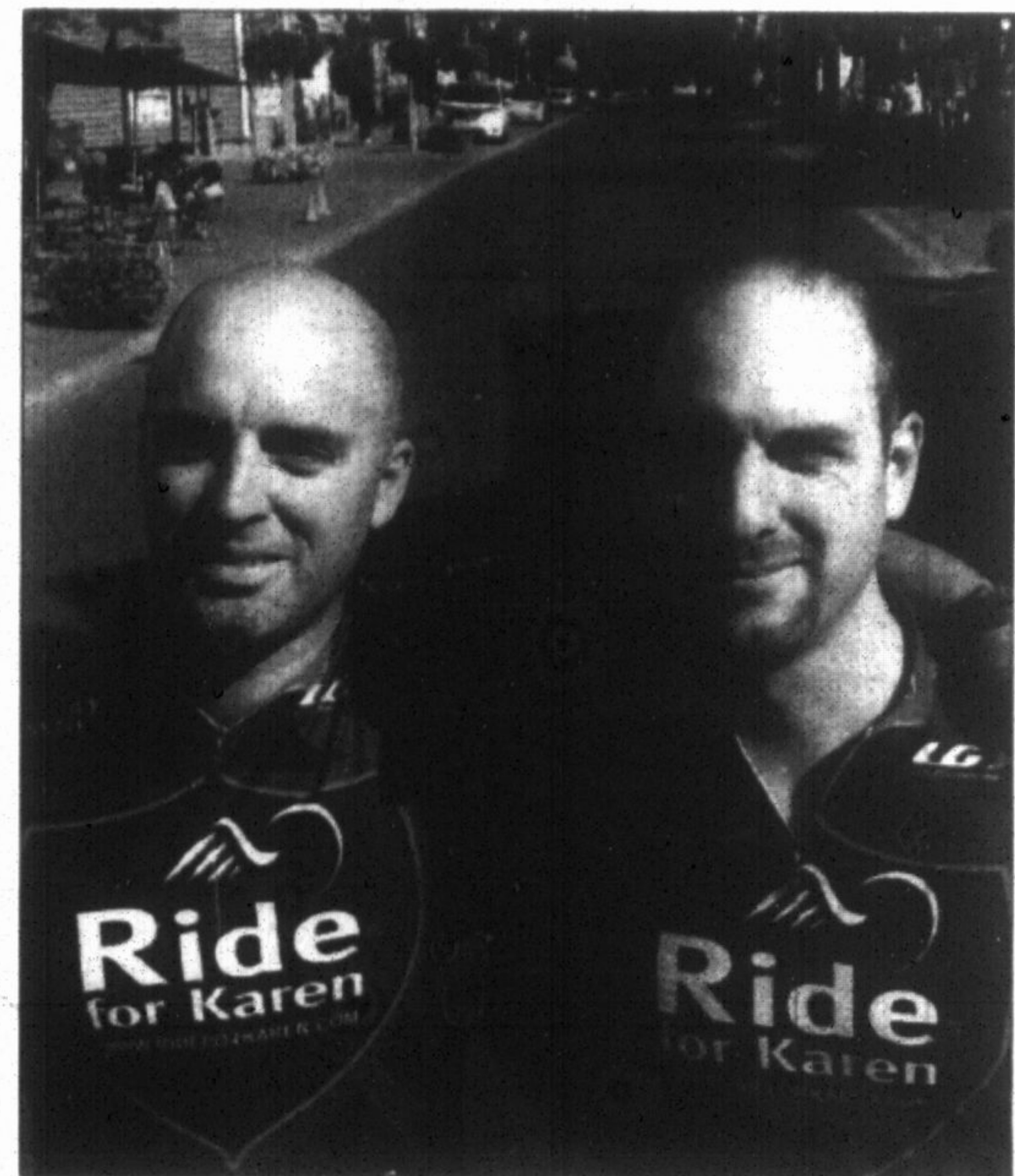
This will be his seventh year riding.

"I was overweight and I knew I had gotten cancer because of my lifestyle. I wanted to get back into being athletic. The cause is great. Being a cancer survivor, I saw this as my opportunity to give back," Mr. Magnanelli said.

There is also an event for children that includes face painting, a bouncy castle and a 1-km bike loop. While this event is free, Kris said they encourage children to fundraise.

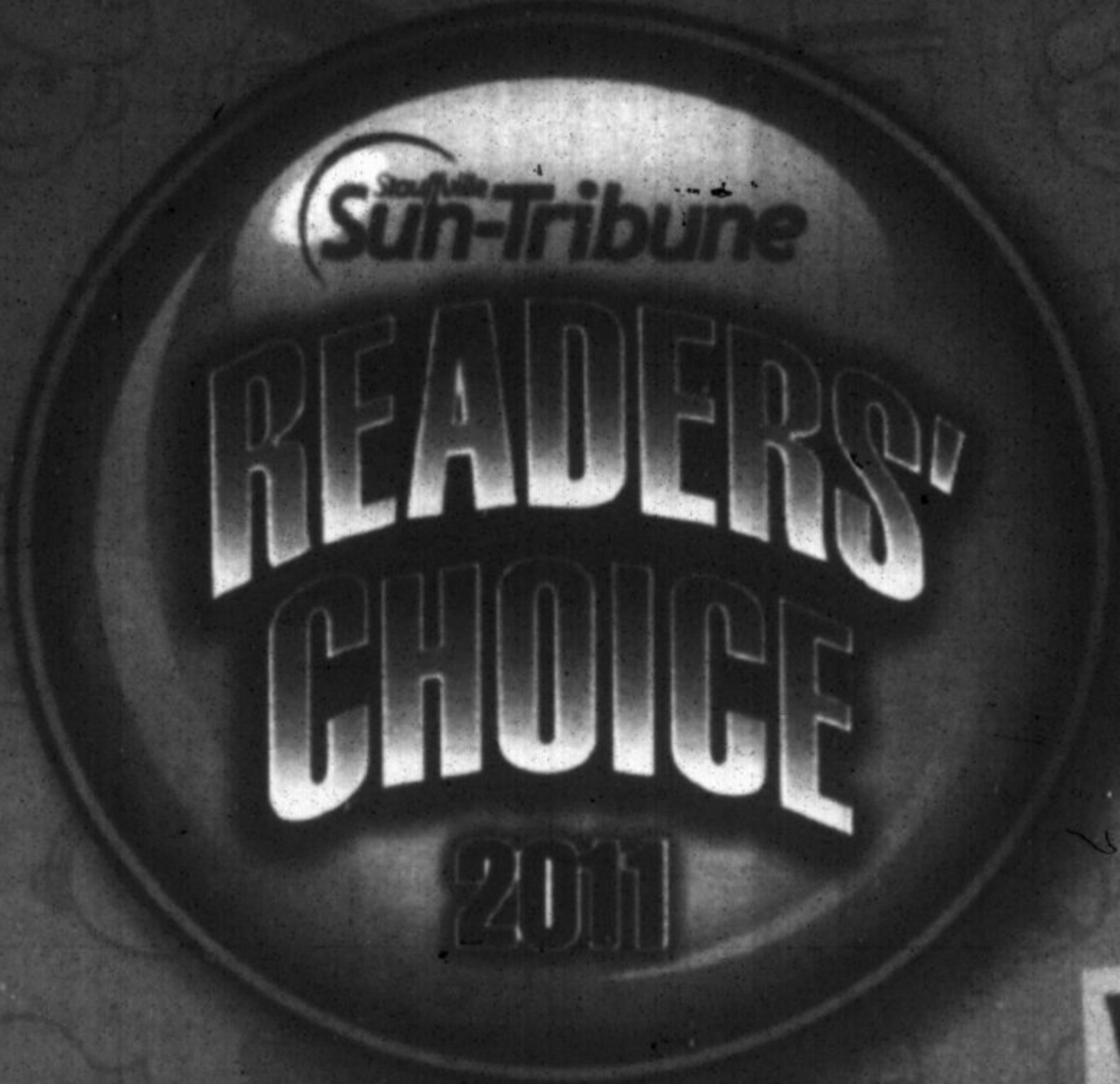
"It teaches them the importance of actually giving to those less fortunate than you in life's circumstances," he said.

This year's goal is to raise \$250,000. As of this week, close to \$100,000 has been raised.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Ride for Karen organizers, brothers Kris (left) and Kirk Tobias, are determined to add to the \$1.4M the duo has already helped raise for Ontario camps for children with cancer. To register for the Sept. 11 event or donate, visit www.rideforkaren.com




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