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FEATURED

## Bike4Alz

Fraternity brothers will bike coast to coast to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease

By Renee Beasley Jones Messenger-Inquirer 8 hrs ago

Photo by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer.com | [geans@messenger-inquirer.com](mailto:geans@messenger-inquirer.com) David Weafer rides along the Adkisson Greenbelt on Friday in Owensboro. Weafer plans to ride the Bike4Alz this summer.

Greg Eans

Talk about gutsy.

David Weafer has never ridden his bicycle more than five miles in one day.

But that will change soon.

Weafer, a 20-year-old psychology major at Western Kentucky University, plans to ride his bicycle 3,600 miles from San Francisco, California, to Virginia Beach, Virginia, this summer in an effort to create awareness and raise money for Alzheimer's research. The ride is called Bike4Alz, which started at WKU in 2010 after the founder's grandpa lost his battle with Alzheimer's.

Since 2010, the bicycle ride has raised nearly \$250,000 for Alzheimer's research.

On May 13, Weafer and 12 of his Phi Gamma Delta brothers will dip their back bicycle wheels in the Pacific Ocean. At the end of the journey on July 20, they will douse their front tires in the Atlantic.

During 60-some days in between, they will crisscross the nation under their own steam.

On the east side of California, they will climb Carson's Pass, which has an elevation of 8,652 feet. Weafer said it is the ride's toughest day.

Before the journey ends, the group will tackle the Rockies and Appalachians. In between those mountain ranges, they will coast through the Great Plains, often fighting wind, rain and hills along the way.

The fraternity brothers -- all novice cyclists -- will average 70 miles per day on their quest to save memories.

"I fell in love with the cause and the process," Weafer said. "I thought I couldn't go through college and not do it."

Weafer, the son of Mike and Sharon Weafer of Owensboro, graduated from Owensboro Catholic High School in 2017.

Each year, a different group of Phi Gamma Delta brothers from WKU take on the nationwide trek. This year's contingent includes 13 cyclists and two support vehicle drivers.

It's not all about the ride, though, Weafer said. They cycle for a cause.

All along the way, they schedule fundraisers. This year's Bike4Alz fundraising goal is \$70,000.

Also, on days off from riding, the group will sometimes visit Alzheimer's residential facilities to interact with patients.

The Bike4Alz website features a Dedicate a Day page, which allows people to enter the name and personal stories of loved ones who suffer from Alzheimer's.

"Each morning, we will reflect on their stories," Weafer said. "We're going to talk about them when we bike that day. It's a cool way for people to be connected to us while we are riding and for us to be connected to them."

The group cuts expenses by staying with fraternity friends, churches or townsfolk they meet along the way. Some nights, they camp out.

On the Bike4Alz Facebook page, some of the friends they made along the way have written about housing the bike team.

"We had this great group of young men stay at our United Methodist Church in Osborne, KS last night," one person wrote on June 22, 2018. "It was an honor to help in some small way as they continue on their journey for awareness for Alzheimer's disease. How wonderful that they take their summer and spend it on something so worthwhile."

The group also relies on business sponsorships. Some companies donate items or provide discounts on bikes, helmets and other cycling-related equipment.



Tyler Jury founded the ride. He was a student and Phi Gamma Delta brother in 2010. Today, Jury is a dentist in Pewee Valley, Kentucky.

Jury was a novice biker when he started Bike4Alz, but crossing the nation on two wheels was on his bucket list. When his grandfather died, he decided to combine that dream with a cause.

"It's something that transformed my life and what I care about and how I spend my time and what I value," Jury said of Bike4Alz.

WKU has several groups that host large fundraisers for various causes, said Charley Pride, director of student activities. But Bike4Alz is the only group that hosts a nationwide cycling trip.

"We are ... excited and proud of our students when they do good works," Pride said. "It is not just about the raising of money but the experience that students gain from organizing and participating in the event."

Bike4Alz's calendar calls for the group to ride into Bowling Green on July 4, just in time to celebrate Independence Day.

"We've already had people say they are going to donate fireworks," Weafer said. "That will be a spirit booster to power us through the rest of the trip."

Until Weafer went to Phoenix last year for an internship, he had never traveled west of St. Louis.

"I'm really excited about it," he said of the upcoming bike ride. "I have a lot of friends who have studied abroad, and they talk about the different cultures there. There are different cultures here, and I'll get to experience that."

In the meantime, he looks forward to spring, when the Bike4Alz group will start some long-distance practice runs as a team.

"Although the riders change each summer, our mission never will," the Bike4Alz website said. "With each year, we wish to reach more people and affect more lives with every mile."

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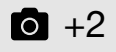
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