

Bike rides benefit sick children

Friends of Karen raises money for families, siblings

BY RUTH EPSTEIN
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KENT — For participants in a bicycle fundraiser, each rotation of the wheels will go toward helping families coping with their children's life-threatening illnesses.

Members of Friends of Karen took off on a 37-mile ride from Kent to Rhinebeck, N.Y., on Friday, the first of three routes they are pedaling this weekend.

The ride is organized by Sal Lillenthal of the Bicycle Tour Co. in Kent. He said Saturday's ride, which went from Litchfield to Millerton, N.Y., was the longest at 90 miles. Today, the group will pedal from Litchfield to Lake Waramaug, a total of 27 miles. Riders have the choice of going one-way or round trip.

Lillenthal and his staff provide a van to follow the group. Spotters give safety backup, mark the roads with directional arrows and provide other things along the way.

The ride has raised \$1 million for the cause in its 10 years of existence. Friends of Karen is named for Karen Macinnes, who died at age 16 from a rare genetic illness. A friend of her family reached out and mobilized support to raise funds to pay for care so that Karen could spend her last days at home.

The friend was encouraged to continue her work, and Friends of Karen was born.

The group provides a range of financial, emotional and advocacy support for families in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut area who are dealing with the catastrophic impact of severely sick children.

Incorporated in 1983 and based in North Salem, N.Y., Friends of Karen has provid-



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A bicycle ride to raise funds for Friends of Karen, a charity that helps families deal with children facing life-threatening illnesses, takes off for a 37-mile trek from Kent to Rhinebeck, N.Y., on Friday. From left, Gary Salmo, Alan Dubow, Vinny Liscio, Sal Lillenthal of event organizer Bicycle Tour Co. of Kent, Lorne Robbins and Gwen Salmo.



Participants in a Friends of Karen fundraising bicycle ride take off Friday from Kent for a 37-mile trip to Rhinebeck, N.Y.

ed assistance to more than 5,500 children and their families.

When taking into account the siblings of the sick children, that number rises to 14,000.

Twenty-eight riders will travel part of the weekend while others will go for the full three-day excursion. Among them is Vinny Liscio, a retired businessman from Ridgefield, who was making

his seventh trip.

"It's a wonderful thing Friends does," he said. "Support is not just given to the kids, but to their families, especially the siblings. We support them as angels."

Lorne Robbins, a retired banker from Somers, N.Y., said Friends is his favorite charity.

"It's amazing what it does," he said. "It provides services to families when there is a

desperate need, such as social workers to help with the emotional trauma and financial aid to deal with insurance costs. I ride this on a regular basis. It's a journey of the heart. Our part is easy compared to what they're facing."

Attorney Alan Dubow of Bedford, N.Y., has made the ride seven times.

"The support for siblings is so important," he said. "Somehow they get left in the dark because the parents are so focused on the illness of the child."

Gwen Salmo, special events coordinator of Friends, said the fund holds a variety of fundraising events and helps children from newborn to age 21.

Her husband, Gary, who participates in triathlons, was among the riders Friday. Of the three events in those competitions, he likes biking the best, he said.

For information about the charity, visit friendsof-karen.org. Contact Ruth Epstein at kcsrute@aol.com.