

Alumni cyclists pack friendship for Reunion ride

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Dave Conrad says he&s looking forward to bicycling with fellow Alfred University (AU) alumni May 31-June 7 from Albany to Alfred for Reunion Weekend, June 7-9. A rider for at least 25 years, Conrad, AU Class of 1976, says bicycling has introduced him to many interesting people and areas of the country.

“It&s gotten me out to smell the smells and feel the feels that are out there when it&s just you and the bike on the road,” says Conrad.

The ride to Reunion Weekend inspired Conrad to rediscover his passion for bicycling. In 2000, he suffered an injury in a Burlington, VT bike race, leading to an 11 and a-half year hiatus from cycling as he fell out of his training schedule and his bicycle gathered cobwebs in his Putnam, CT home.

After reading an article about the alumni bike trip, he decided to retrain and participated in last year&s trip. He says camaraderie and reminiscing among the alumni makes the event successful.

“What really brings people back is the fact that you have fun,” says Conrad. “You have a pre-ride meal at the crack of dawn, you&re on a bike basically all day and at the end of the day, you sit down and have a nice beer.”

1958 graduates Elliot Lasky and Russ Fahey began this tradition in 1998, when they biked to their 40th Reunion from Colmar, PA, Lasky&s hometown, through the Pocono Mountains to Alfred. Ten years later, they repeated the journey with classmates Andy Seaman and Roger Eiss, who is riding for the fifth time this year. Fahey of Daytona Beach, FL, will also again be cycling.

“I’m delighted that I agreed to bike in 2008,” says Eiss of Ridgefield, WA. “That first experience sold me on this bike ride and I have been on every one since.”

“Roger enjoyed doing this so much five years ago that we wanted to do it every year,” says Lasky. “For the past three years, he has spearheaded the bike ride to Reunion.”

The past three routes have taken the alumni cyclists through the Catskill, Adirondack, and Allegheny mountains in 2010, 2011 and 2012, respectively. The riders stop at the end of each day at hotels to sleep and refresh. They partake in lunches and dinners during the journey, sometimes with fellow alums from the area where they are passing through, culminating with the “Triumph Celebration” dinner at the Sunset Inn in Hornell, where a group of local Alfred alumni and former and current faculty and staff members greet them.

This year&s sojourn, titled “Alums Along the Mohawk” by the riders, will run through New York State&s Finger Lakes Region following the Erie Canal. Eiss says nine of the 17 participants (including drivers, family members, and

several alumni cycling only a portion of the route) will cycle the entire route with four drivers following in case of any problems with the riders, bicycles, or weather.

Despite his excitement for this year's ride, Conrad will stop riding on Thursday because he must return to Connecticut — his daughter, Chesa, a 2003 Alfred University graduate, is getting married June 8.

"I certainly want to do the ride, but I want to get through it healthy and without much sunburn and no road burns," says Conrad. "Hopefully everybody has a safe journey and the weather is nice and sunny."

Two other alumni riders who won't complete the entire trip are Dave Holleb '77, who will ride during the first two days, and Barney Hart '58, who will ride Sunday, June 2.

"I'm looking forward to the Sunday ride because it's through a lot of park land," says Hart of Nashua, NH. "There's a lot of wild area that looks very pretty."

This year's journey does have a somber aspect. Stu Duff, Lasky's friend from Colmar, PA who accompanied the bikers in 2008, passed away in February. Duff's daughters, Margaret Duff and Carol Pring, will bike on the first day, while their mother will ride along in a car. Eiss says the trip will be dedicated to Duff and Lasky will offer patches to the riders in his honor.

The itinerary for the week-long ride includes:

- Friday, May 31: Arrival and Get Acquainted Dinner, Albany
- Saturday, June 1: See the sights in Albany, test bikes, and ride to kickoff dinner
- Sunday, June 2: Albany to Amsterdam
- Monday, June 3: Amsterdam to Utica
- Tuesday, June 4: Utica to Weedsport
- Wednesday, June 5: Weedsport to Penn Yan
- Thursday, June 6: Penn Yan to Hornell (traditional end-of-ride dinner, at the Sunset Inn joined by other Alfred alums, faculty, and staff)
- Friday, June 7: Victory ride from Hornell to the King Alfred statue at the center of campus.

Eleven of this year's participants say bicycling has had a positive influence in their lives and they're looking forward to arriving at Reunion Weekend through this unique experience with fellow Alfred graduates.

"Bicycling has allowed me for the majority of my life to have one car, three bicycles and save on gasoline, and keep my weight the same," says Larry Ploetz '68 of Newark, Ohio.

Dave Perry '61 of Oconomowoc, WI admits he may not have attended his 50th Reunion in 2011 had it not been for the ride.

"I was glad that I did!" says Perry. "Although I had not 'kept up' with many classmates, everyone was an instant good friend. Relating after 50 years was a great experience."

He also agrees the camaraderie makes the rides special.

"Each has its unique attractions and all result in the friendships that develop with the shared experiences," says Perry.

Other riders agree that the event is more about the communal experience rather than proving their physical abilities.

"It's not as serious a bike ride as I thought of originally," says Holleb of Gladstone, NJ. "It's more of an enjoyable kind of thing."

Dave Wilcox &58 agrees with Holleb and praises the organizers for creating a relaxed culture.

“This is not fostered as an ‘extreme& sport event,” says Wilcox of Sun Lakes, AZ.

“This is not just to test our muscles and heart,” adds Lasky. “It&s for the camaraderie of biking together with friends and making new friends along the way too.”

Lasky, 81, says he will ride as much of the route as he can.

“What I mostly want is to have a good time and not get hurt,” he says.

Jim Randall &77 credits the organizers& diligent work to keep in contact with classmates and the Alumni Office&s services for helping to consistently retain and add riders to the event.

“We have such a small school that everybody kind of knows everybody,” says Randall of Bath, N.Y. “I&m looking forward to good weather, cold beer and renewing some good friendships that developed over the last year.”

Donna Bruschi &84 and Mary Bouchard &73 of Trumansburg are the first two alumnae to be part of the Reunion bike riders group.

“I think I&m the youngest one going by about 11 years. I&m totally impressed and a little worried because I&m not sure I&ll be able to keep up with them,” says Bruschi of New Paltz. “I&ve never met any of these people before and they&re from a whole different generation than I am and yet I feel like I know them. There&s this kind of community that&s already there even though they don&t know me, I feel comfortable with them.”