

THE SUDBURY TOWN CRIER

Take a Positive Spin for ALS on May 18

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amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), better known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a progressively crippling and eventually fatal neuromuscular condition.

When diagnosed, a victim faces but one outcome - total loss of muscle control while mind stays completely intact, and an agonizing death by gradual suffocation.

Wayland's Myke Farricker, Watertown's Paul Tamburello and Framingham's Steve Austin have all been affected in different ways by ALS.

Farricker's brother Pete succumbed to the disease in 2001 at the age of 45; Tamburello had symptoms very similar to those of ALS, and was later diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy, a non-fatal muscular disorder; and three years ago, Austin lost a close friend, George Soerheide, who died after a five-year battle with the disease.

Today, the three men are the co-chairmen of the ALS Association, Massachusetts Chapter's annual cycling event and fundraiser, Positive Spin for ALS, which will start and end this year at the Longfellow Club on Route 20 in Wayland near the Sudbury River on Sunday, May 18.

Positive Spin consists of four concurrent bike rides - 10, 25, 50 and 100 miles - each named in honor of a local person stricken with ALS. The rides begin at the Longfellow Club.

Money raised through the event will support services for more than 200 local patients and families living with the disease, as well as medical research projects aimed at unlocking the secrets of the disorder.

This is the third year that Longfellow will host the ride for ALS. In 2001, Farricker, one of the club's co-owners, joined forces with Austin, who was working at Longfellow at the time, to create a fundraiser to honor loved ones with ALS.

Farricker rode in memory of his brother, a re-active sportsman and writer for Golf Digest Magazine.

"Originally, I thought I would be riding in my brother's honor," Farricker said. "But by the time the event, I was riding in his memory.

Needless to say, it was a very emotional day for me."

At the same time, Tamburello was organizing his own 86-mile solo ride for the seventh consecutive year. Farricker read an article about it, remembered that he had met Tamburello at a personal growth seminar in 1978, and called to contribute. Ultimately, the three men decided to join forces in 2002.

Positive Spin for ALS, the trademarked name of Tamburello's ride, was retained for the combined event.

"It was a name that had had a track record and recognition since 1995, the year of my first fundraising ride," Tamburello said.

This year, novices can join the 10-mile loop along the back roads of Sudbury. Called George's Ride after George Soerheide of Ashland, the course meanders along scenic Water Row in Sudbury and through back roads and conservation lands. All riders must be at least 12 years of age to participate in this ride and riders under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult on the same route.

More experienced bikers looking for a longer, leisurely ride can participate in Pete's Ride, named for Pete Farricker. This is a 25-mile loop through the back roads of Wayland and Sudbury.

All riders must be at least 12 years of age to participate in this ride and riders under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult on the same route.

For the touring enthusiast, Positive Spin also includes Ken's Ride, named for Ken Melanson, who is now battling ALS. Ken's Ride is a 50-mile loop that explores Hudson, Bolton and Acton and returns through historic Concord. This ride features rolling hills and breathtaking landscapes dotted with rustic farms and orchards.

All riders must be at least 16 years old to ride this course.

Finally, experts will appreciate the challenge of the 100-mile long Scott's Ride named for Scott Carlson, a New Englander who, up to the late 1990s, competed in triathlons and competitive surfing tournaments around the world. Carlson was diagnosed with ALS in

1999 and today is bound to a motorized wheelchair.

Scott's Ride heads west to Princeton, and includes the summit road at Mount Wachusett before winding back through Acton and Concord.

This ride is not for the faint of heart. All riders must be at least 16 years old to ride this course.

The registration fee is the same for any length ride. Online registration at www.positivespinforals.org is \$50 for an individual, \$65 for a family before May 12. To account for administrative costs, snail mail registrations postmarked on or before May 12 are \$60 for an individual or \$85 for a family. Registrations postmarked after May 12 up to the day of the event are \$70 for an individual or \$95 for a family.

Aside from Austin, Farricker and Tamburello, members of this year's planning committee include Dan and Judy Clawson of Sudbury, Deborah Duncombe of Waltham, Chris Joy of Methuen, Denise Nolan of Cambridge and Barbara Soerheide of Ashland.

Last year's event attracted 300 riders and raised more than \$121,000. This year, the organizers hope to surpass both of these figures.

At the conclusion of the ride, participants are invited to enjoy a hearty lunch and music back at the Longfellow Club.

For more information about Positive Spin, to sign up or to volunteer for various tasks before, during and after the ride, contact the ALS Association, Massachusetts Chapter, by phone at 781-326-8884, by mail at 75 McNeil Way, Suite 201, Dedham MA 02026, or online at www.positivespinforals.org.

Volunteers are needed for various tasks before, during and after the ride. For more information on volunteer job listings, visit www.positivespinforals.org/volunteer.html

For riders who want to start road training for the ride, The Longfellow Club organizes Sunday morning rides, open to the public, leaving from and returning to the club. The rides range from 15-50 miles, depending on the route chosen by riders that day, and all levels of riders are welcome. For more information, contact Myke Farricker by e-mail at myke@longfellowsportsclub.com.