



Tour DaVita brings 475 riders for overnight stay

By *Pete Temple*, Express Sports Editor

They rode in, they showered, they ate, they danced, they partied.

Most of all, the 475 riders from Tour DaVita turned the Great Jones County Fairgrounds into their own village Tuesday, Sept. 18. Monticello was the final stop in the three-day long-distance bicycle event that raises money for the kidney disease awareness.

The event is held in a different state each year; this year was Iowa's turn. It began Sunday, Sept. 16 with a 77-mile ride from Allison, Iowa to Independence. From there, riders could choose a 50-mile or 80-mile route to Manchester, where they stayed Sept. 17.

There were two routes to Monticello, of 77 or 100 miles.

It was billed by some as a "mini-RAGBRAI," but there was nothing "mini" about it. Giant tents were erected at the fairgrounds, the largest of which was used for a wedding reception-style event the evening of Sept. 18. It featured a meal catered by We 3 Catering of Belmond, Iowa. There was a dance with a live band, and a presentation of more than 250 blankets to Camp Courageous.

A fireworks display lit up the Monticello sky late in the evening.

Most of the riders were DaVita employees, others were family members or friends. Each rider had to raise \$1,000 in sponsorships to secure a spot in the ride.

"I've done it since the first year," said Brittany Plute of Cleveland, Ohio after completing the trip to Monticello. "Originally it was for patients I help in my clinics, but it's actually turned into something closer, because my dad has recently had some kidney issues as well. I want to be as well educated and help other people be as well educated as possible."

Backroads, a travel company that specializes in scenic bike rides, set up the routes, and put together an elaborate setup for the incoming riders. There were balloon towers leading to a giant finishing area. There were rows of tents - 290 in all - for the bikers to stay in. Food stands and refreshments were also provided, along with showering vans and other necessities.

Yvonne Collins and Antonia Espino of California, who have ridden the event together two of the last three years, were among those who took advantage.

"We were going to do the 100(-mile route), but each night we've gotten back so late that we couldn't get a massage," Collins said. "So we decided, let's treat ourselves, and enjoy some of the other festivities that are going on."

The company also provided most of the bicycles - about 90 of the riders brought their own - and service vans.

DaVita teams organized bus transportation to the Cedar Rapids airport on Wednesday morning, following the event.

The riders were in for some surprises. For one thing, many were not prepared for low temperatures in the mid-40s that seeped into their tents overnight. An emergency run to a store for blankets and jackets was made.

Also, riders were surprised to learn that Eastern Iowa has more hills than they anticipated.

"They need to find a place that doesn't have as many hills or as much wind," joked Neal Lindley, a rider from Marin County, Calif.

Riding between 200 and 250 miles over three days is no small feat, and each day, participants were greeted by rows of cheering fellow riders as they crossed the finish line.

"I made it through the whole entire thing on the first day," said Karrie Conley of Laguna Beach, Calif. "I almost started crying, and I'm not a crier. I was so emotional."

In all, the event raised more than \$850,000 for kidney disease treatment and awareness.

"It's greatly supported," Lindley said.

DaVita, Inc. is a Fortune 500 company and a leading provider of kidney care in the U.S., delivering dialysis services to patients with chronic kidney failure and end state renal disease.

This is the sixth year of Tour DaVita, and this year's proceeds went to Bridge of Life, which brings treatment, education and hope to underserved communities around the world.

"It's for a wonderful cause," Espino said. "We work in a dialysis center, and we see a need for all those patients who have no money."

PHOTOS: Top: Riders in Tour DaVita pedal up Amber Road into Monticello on Tuesday, Sept. 18. In all, about 475 riders stayed overnight at the Great Jones County Fairgrounds. Bottom: Holding hands as they cross the finish line near the Berndes Center, Antonia Espino (left) and Yvonne Collins of California complete a 77-mile route to Monticello. (Photos by Pete Temple)

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