

The Sanford Herald
Tour DaVita is cycling for a cause
September 27, 2015

SANFORD – Over three days, 560 bicyclists will ride a combined 140,000 miles on winding routes through Lee and Moore counties, looping around to see as much of the landscape as possible, to raise money for awareness of kidney disease and medical missions in the U.S. and abroad.

Tour DaVita, an annual fundraising event sponsored by Denver-based DaVita HealthCare Partners, raised \$1.2 million this year for the ninth annual ride. Each year, Tour DaVita organizing team chooses a different location around the country, and Sanford was this year's choice, said Tour Communications Manager LeVar Battle.

Cyclists started arriving from around the country on Saturday afternoon, departing tour buses to a “tent city” already set up at the Lee County fairgrounds on N. Seventh Street. The city includes 350 tents managed by Backroads, a travel organization that helps manage active events.

“We've been here since year one partnering with DaVita,” said Ride Director Jason Stawiski from Backroads. “Each year, it grows a little, but it's a smooth event. We are excited. There's so much energy here from everyone that it's going to be great – even if it's rainy.”

Stawiski said that Backroads brought in 65 workers for this event. They arrived on Thursday and started site preparations, including the set up of tents, a “bike row” area where the participants' bikes are stored, a large activity tent, and various other tents and trash cans throughout the fairgrounds. This year, workers from Backroads and DaVita also bought plywood to create walking paths to help with the muddy fields.

“One of the great things is that with our event, we do help the local economy,” Battle said. “I'm pretty sure we actually bought out all of the rain boots in Sanford! We went everywhere and bought them when we got here. Everything we use we will buy here. We also hire some people locally to help with cooking, serving, and even as

massage therapists to come in at night to give massages to our cyclists.”

The cyclists include at least 11 patients who are being treated for kidney disease, some of whom are undergoing dialysis while participating in the ride. Ten physicians also ride with the group, and many of the cyclists are employees of DaVita, said Emily Tidwell, senior wisdom manager at DaVita.

Tidwell is in charge of fundraising for the event, which she says has been increasing as more people participate.

“It's not that hard to get donations, though,” said Beth Bache, a DaVita employee who participated in the ride for the first time this year. “I just told people what I was doing and that I was raising money, and it's such a great cause that people love to help.”

Brock Cornell, a four-year veteran of the ride and information technology worker at DaVita, said that he and a group of riders host a few fundraisers throughout the year.

“We have a car wash, hold a dunking booth, host a poker tournament. It's a really fun experience,” he said. “I feel like every year is getting better – or maybe I'm just getting used to riding more!”

Riders will set out at 8:30 a.m. today for a 79-mile ride through Lee County. They then return to camp and head out Monday for a different loop around Lee before leaving on Tuesday to end up in Pinehurst for the night, said Justin Forbis, the ride's communications coordinator.

“We look for places like this because we want the ride to have a local feel. We try to create that here [in the campground area], and the staff that visits and travels looks for a similar feeling in the places they choose,” he said.

Tour DaVita cyclists and staff will be tweeting about the event throughout using #tourdavita.