



Photo contributed

ew Purvis, the first dialysis patient to participate in Tour DaVita, crossed the finish line after three days, 250 miles, and a four dialysis treatment. This year's bike tour begins and ends in Great Barrington, running from Sept. 17 — 21 and covers 262 miles.

## 62-mile bike tour planned to raise funds for kidney disease prevention, research

By Allison Sheardy

REAT BARRINGTON — Nationwide, one x adults has some form of kidney disease at means that over 31 million Americans affected. Of those patients, more that 6,000 currently on dialysis in the state of Massachusetts alone. This fall DaVita is going to smething about it.

our DaVita is a 262 mile fundraiser that is money for The Kidney TRUST (a charomred by DaVita that works to prevent ey disease through research and aware-). The route's locale changes every year s tour has taken place across the country. year, it starts in Great Barrington, winds ay through New York State, and goes to ison, Conn. before concluding back in Great ington. The event begins on Sept. 17 and ludes on Sept. 21.

n Saturday, Sept. 17, cyclists will be tled into Great Barrington after arriving e Bradley International Airport. Then the truly begins on Sunday, as 450 participants e their way from Great Barrington across 62 mile route. The finale and shuttle back e airport is scheduled for Sept. 21.

his year, several kidney patients will be icipating in the event — in fact, some will n their days with dialysis before starting : route. "The cool thing about this year's is that we'll have two patients who are gin the event," Vince Hancock with DaVita "On the second day of the event, both rid- days will include four hours of dialysis to ong with their 75 miles of cycling!"

ince its inception, Tour DaVita raised \$1.75 on to promote kidney disease awareness. aVita provides kidney care services in 1,700 cs. DaVita does not have any clinics in the

Berkshires; however, there are dialysis centers in Torrington and Bloomfield, Conn. Tour DaVita is held in a different location every year. Past routes have run from Tacoma to Shelton, Washington, Greenville to Grand Haven, Michigan, New London to Sturgeon, Wisconsin, and Sheffield, Alabama to Brentwood, Tennessee.

So why Great Barrington this year? Every year, DaVita looks for a new location for their hike tour. They do so by identifying a local organization they'd like to support, and then hold the event in that organization's hometown — and this

year, DaVita identified Railroad Street Youth Project as their chosen organization, explained Jocelyn Vassos, the apprenticeship manager at RSYP. This partnership meant significant monetary donations for RSYP.

"DaVita gave us a monetary donation upfront of \$50,000, which is going to a major renovation of our space," Vassos said. The youth drop-in center is located at 60 B ridge Street.

She added that besides the initial donation, DaVita then goes to people within their company

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Photo contributed

This year, about 450 cyclists, including two dialysis patients, will participate in Tour DaVita.

# Bike tour funds research, helps community

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many that want to donate additional items. In this case, RSYP has received computers, a TV, office furniture, a pinball machine, ping pong table, landscaping out front, kitchen appliances, and more.

"We've pounded the pavement a bit and have working very closely with DaVita, they are really the catalyst for

these changes," Vassos said.

According to Brenda Barlow, executive director at RSYP, some of the renovations had been planned – but not yet funded – prior to DaVita's involvement.

"We had a series of focus groups to find out what the youth wanted," she said. "I want to always make sure that the youth's voice is heard first...our goal is to empower

youth."

The focus groups determined that a more productive work space should be the main objective of the facelift.

At that time, one participant actually devised a floor plan, which was later used to guide the renovations. Barlow emphasized keeping the kids part of the process and having them make decisions about the space.

When DaVita "kind of fell into my lap," she said, "It sounded too good to be true."

"It is so exciting," Barlow said, likening the daily deliveries to Christmas. "We get boxes everyday of stuff being delivered."

DaVita chose RSYP partly because they believe it is important to educate kids about kidney disease prevention.

Barlow added, "They saw how important it can be for kids to have a trusted adult they can turn to. They really got our mission."

She continued, "We want to get people excited about helping kids."

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