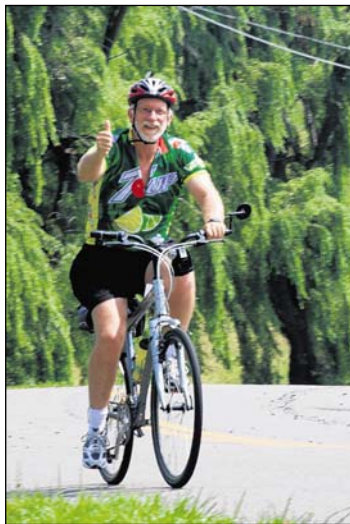


Big Walker Century Ride raises funds for HOPE

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A record number of bicyclists participated in the seventh annual Big Walker Century Ride held last Saturday. The ride began in downtown Wytheville and ended there and journeys through the Wythe County and Bland County countryside.



The ride offered participants a choice of four different routes: a 100-mile course, a 62-mile (metric century) ride, a 40-mile journey, or a 25-mile jaunt. All of the routes featured challenging elevation climbs.



The record number of entrants helped the ride raise the most money yet. The ride is a fundraiser for HOPE (Helping Overcome Poverty's Existence). HOPE's Executive Director Andy Kegley said the ride raised slightly more than \$10,000. He noted that 139 riders participated out of the 150 that registered.

Kegley also said the ride benefited from several sponsors which included a major contribution from the Virginia Housing Development Authority. More of the sponsors are planned to be listed in a follow-up story, along with the names and times of the participants.



The extra sponsorship allowed the ride directors to give a medal to each finisher for the first time. It was an extra courtesy that many riders appreciated. Larry Farris noted that "I came down from

northern Kentucky (Cincinnati area) for this tour and it was worth every bit of the drive. I have raced and toured all over the Midwest and Southeast and your tour is one of the most beautiful and well run events I have ever attended in 15 years of cycling. The scenery was absolutely stunning and the medal at the finish was a classy touch. I have dragged my body over Mt. Mitchell in North Carolina many times and no one ever gave me a medal. Thanks for the great tour."

Kegley noted that this year's winner of the 100-mile ride was Casey Vedder of Mt. Airy, N.C. He finished the course in five hours, 16 minutes. The slowest riders were timed at 10 hours and 30 minutes.

There were 69 competitors in the 100-mile ride, said Kegley, and 49 riders in the 62-mile ride.