

TRULife

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2016

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A CHARITABLE CROSS COUNTRY ADVENTURE

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Nothing says friendship like biking about 4,000 miles across the country together during the hot summer months. Two Truman State alumni are gearing up to do just that. Friends Max McDermott and Alex Hromockyj aren't just in it for the adventure. They have a larger goal in mind — to raise awareness for affordable housing with the Bike & Build organization.

Starting June 17, McDermott and Hromockyj, along with other 300 riders split between eight different routes with 30 riders on each route, will begin their journey in Portland, Maine and end in Santa Barbara, California, Sept. 1. Along the way, bikers will stop at various Bike & Build sites to help build affordable housing homes.

Bike & Build's mission is to provide affordable housing for all Americans and empower young adults for a lifetime of service and civic engagement, according to bikeandbuild.org. Housing is considered affordable if payments, taxes and basic utilities do not exceed 30 percent of a household's gross income, according to the site. One out of four rental households in the U.S. are owned by low income individuals and families, according to the site.

McDermott said he and Hromockyj learned about Bike & Build from friends and decided they wanted to participate during this year's trip. But signing up was just the first step. McDermott said they each have to log 500 miles of biking and raise \$4,500 as a prerequisite for the trip.

"[The money] will in part be helping us get from one end of the country to the other," McDermott said. "In some sense, it goes toward keeping us alive. But it doesn't just go towards a bunch of young kids going on a cool trip. That money goes towards the large pot of money all riders raise that goes directly to the affordable housing cause."

At the moment, McDermott said he's raised about 700 dollars. Along with letter campaigns, McDermott said he's thinking about coming back to Kirksville

and hosting a Battle of the Bands event to raise money.

McDermott said an average day during the trip will consist of waking up early — about 4 or 5 a.m. — and biking 40-110 miles a day. He said they travel between each host site — such as churches — and are assigned to various crews, like a breakfast crew or a laundry crew. He said at each host site, everyone will check their bikes and make sure everything is functioning correctly. Then they ride again.

When they stop for a build day with an affordable housing construction site, however, McDermott said they'll drive to the build site.

"[We're] trading in our bikes for hammers," McDermott said.

McDermott said he used to bike competitively. He said during the winter, he trained for half-hour intervals, but once it is warmer out, he will be putting in more miles on the road.

Although McDermott said he is an avid biker, he also said he's really looking forward to the service aspect of the trip. McDermott said he works in a psychiatric ward, and many of the kids he works with come from impoverished backgrounds.

"I believe in a holistic view of health," McDermott said. "As a result of this holistic viewpoint I am interested in a number of causes. To me, [mental health and affordable housing] seem very related."

McDermott said he hopes the experience will impact him, and he will not only become a better therapist, but also have a better understanding of his patients and become a more gentle human being.

McDermott said he's also excited about the adventure and that he's going with Hromockyj.

"He's my best friend, so I'm planning on sticking with him," McDermott said.

Hromockyj studied environmental studies when he was at Truman and said he liked the idea of biking leaving less of an ecological footprint on their journey, as opposed to the amount of gas it would take to drive across the country.

Hromockyj said he was familiar with the affordable housing movement when he signed up for Bike & Build, but not altogether knowledgeable about it.

"For me, I've always been interested in helping people," Hromockyj said. "Coupled with the 4,000-mile bike ride across the country, I think it's great."

Hromockyj currently is in France and said he will be there until the Bike & Build trip begins, so he is having to do a lot of his fundraising and training there. He said he's received some funds from friends and family, and is planning to reach out to businesses in France for help.

As far as training goes, Hromockyj said he hasn't done a lot of biking during the past, but he said he used to bike and walk everywhere while attending Truman. He said while he is in France, he and one of his friends plan to bike around the country and to surrounding European countries to complete the 500 mile prerequisite.

Because he hasn't done a lot of biking, Hromockyj said he definitely has a lot of nerves about the upcoming trip, but the enthusiasm and excitement overpowers the nerves.

Hromockyj said it was hard to narrow down what he's most excited for about the trip, but not impossible.

Hromockyj said he's excited about biking across the country and meeting the other riders and the people they'll help along the way, as well as getting to see a lot of the varied landscapes the states have to offer. Learning how to build homes, something Hromockyj said he aspires to do later on in life, is another aspect he said interests him.

"[And] one more thing, Max and I have been best friends since we got to Truman, so getting to solidify that relationship is also something I'm really looking forward to," Hromockyj said.

Anyone interested in helping McDermott and Hromockyj each reach their \$4,500 goal can donate to their rider profiles on the Bike & Build site — for McDermott, go to his profile at classic.bikeandbuild.org/rider/8610, and for Hromockyj, visit classic.bikeandbuild.org/rider/8727. People can also reach out to them by email at mvm6122@truman.edu and amh6336@truman.edu. McDermott said he thinks it would be cool for other Truman students to get involved with Bike & Build at bikeandbuild.org.