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Perspectives

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Fall 2010 Volume 3, Issue 1

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

A Word from the Executive Director Randall Hoedeman, Ph.D.

On May 21, 2010, 18 bicyclists from World T.E.A.M. Sports lined up on the San Francisco coast with their rear wheels in the Pacific Ocean. Their Goal? To start pedaling and to keep pedaling until, some 4000 miles later, their front wheels rested in the Atlantic Ocean off Virginia Beach. On July 24, they achieved their goal. Their purpose? To honor and to call attention to the sacrifice, the heroism, the needs, and especially the abilities of wounded and "disabled" veterans from all of our nation's wars—and to do from "sea to shining sea."

The remarkable uniqueness of this determined band of brothers and sisters? They, themselves, were wounded and left with permanent disabilities. Consequently, they not only successfully completed the trip in 63 days—an incredible feat even for fully trained athletes without physical impairments—but, in some cases, "pedaled" every mile of the way (including through the Rockies) with their arms! Pittsburgh's own Eric Frazier, who grew up on the North Side, is an amazing case in point.

The reason this inspiring story is in a PPI director's note? Because of the dedicated efforts and generosity of PPI board member, and former president, Jim Noland and his wife Anne. Together, they did some serious organizing and fund-raising to help applaud the leg of the journey that led through Pittsburgh. The applause began near the airport where local cyclists, including Jim (who is in good shape but no longer a spring chicken!), a police

escort, and what Jim called some "really loud, big, and cool fire engines" joined the teammates and led (or trailed in Jim's case) them into the city. At one point, Jim received some much needed wind in his sails when he saw a fireman "standing in front of his firehouse in full dress with his axe in hand, as if it might be a rifle, standing at full attention as we passed." Jim's response? To pump a little harder.



A group of 18 bicyclists rode from sea to shining sea to raise awareness of the sacrifice, heroism, needs, and abilities of wounded and "disabled" veterans from all of our nation's wars.

Listen to Jim share one encounter on this journey:

"Riding together into Pittsburgh, we encountered a long, steep hill near the West End Bridge on Steuben Street. I gritted my teeth and started the climb—while looking down so I wouldn't be discouraged by the road ahead. Half way up the hill, with my lungs pumping and my legs aching, I thought that dismounting

and walking the rest of the way might be the better option. I looked for the curb but instead saw a rider on a hand cycle working feverishly next to me. I thought to myself that I certainly had no right to think about quitting—and made another commitment to reach the top. When we both got there, we exchanged glances and I know that he, with his lost leg, and me, at my ripe old age, had proven to ourselves that there was a lot left in the tank. As much as anything, we had shared a moment in the victory of that challenge. I hope that it gave him as much excitement as it gave me."

The applause continued in an afternoon ceremony on the great lawn next to Heinz Field where Mayor Luke Ravenstahl proclaimed July 14, 2010 as World T.E.A.M. Sports Sea to Shining Sea Day. And the applause concluded that evening at a banquet at the PNC Park Lexus Club that was emceed by former Steelers Edmund Nelson and Robin Cole, addressed by former Governor Tom Ridge, and attended by the Mayor, City and County Council members, and several other former Steelers. The speakers were eloquent, but none more so than the two team members—including Eric Frazier—who simply told their stories. Beyond this, the mere presence of the cyclists provided the most powerful statement of all.

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Whatever the banquet attendees' views on and feelings about the various wars that launched this cross-country journey—and most certainly the full range of views and feelings were in attendance—there was



unanimous agreement on one basic fact: that this was a mission that everyone could, like the aforementioned firefighter and with very few dry eyes, stand and salute. There was also full agreement that Jim and Anne deserved a heart-felt round of applause for the more than \$50,000 that their efforts raised locally to assist charities that work with persons with disabilities.

In addition to Jim and Anne's involvement, this event has two other connections to PPI. One is the very timely fact that, in anticipation of the mental-health and family-therapy needs of returning veterans and their families, several PPI therapists have received specialized training in addressing these needs, including post-traumatic stress. I was privileged to give the evening's invocation, which I will share here as a prayerful conclusion:"

We give Thee thanks for this day, for this place, and for each person here. We are grateful for the privilege to welcome and to honor this band of brothers and sisters. In doing so, we honor each road they have traveled to get here. Among others, we honor the road through Vietnam, the road through Beirut, the road through Iraq, the road through Afghanistan, and that remarkable road that begins with rear wheels in the Pacific Ocean.

We also pause to honor all those whose road never led them home.

We thank Thee for the courage, the dedication, the determination, and the love that have brought their wheels to Pittsburgh. And we pray for Thy continued guidance, protection, and blessing on the journey ahead: the one that ends with front wheels in the Atlantic— and the one that stretches far beyond and makes a lasting difference in the lives, and the roads, of all those they touch and inspire along the way.