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Booty riders race past \$1 million mark

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Nearly 1,500 bike riders zoomed under the tree canopy of a popular Charlotte loop this weekend, raising more than \$1 million to fight cancer.

By late Saturday, said organizers of the ninth running of 24 Hours of Booty, the annual bike ride in Myers Park had raised \$1.07 million for cancer research.

It's the first time the event has raised that much before its conclusion, and is one sign of the event's growth. Organizers say additional donations usually trickle in during the days after the event.

This year, 24 Hours of Booty has spread to two other cities - Columbia, Md., and Atlanta - and organizers say they hope to add more cities and keep expanding in Charlotte.

"Before now, we've had to manage our growth," said Spencer Luerdes, who thought up the event nine years ago, when it was just himself and a handful of friends. "But now, we have the infrastructure. People are raising more; we're increasing the fundraising minimums; we're having people come from other cities."

The annual event, which is a fundraiser for the Lance Armstrong Foundation and local cancer organizations, took place from 7 p.m. Friday to 7 p.m. Saturday. Riders circled the Booty Loop, a scenic stretch of roads surrounding Queens University of Charlotte.

This year's event opened for registration in January. In nine days, all 1,300 rider slots were filled. About 150 additional riders also participated during the final five hours this weekend in a program called "Reboot," where registered riders who leave the course can give their numbers to late registrants.

On Saturday, the area around the university was filled with riders - from accomplished cyclists who rode hundreds of miles to cancer survivors who shared their stories with people who had been through the same thing.

And there were people who fit into both categories.

In 2007, Bryan Shields was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He spent 180 days enduring chemotherapy and radiation treatments that further weakened his body. Before he

was diagnosed, he ran half marathons; after his treatments ended, he could barely get his bike up a steep hill.

He heard about 24 Hours of Booty and set a goal in 2008: a mile for every day he spent getting treatment.

On Saturday, Shields, now 32, said he'd gotten his 180 miles, plus an additional 20 in honor of friends and loved ones who also battled cancer.

"At first, it was about me," he said. "But now, it's far beyond me."

Deniece Becker was training for her second marathon in November 2008. She had just gotten in from an 18-mile run and was about to sit down for breakfast when she started seizing on her sitting room floor. At the hospital, she learned that she had a brain tumor.

This was her second time participating in 24 Hours of Booty. This time, she rode on a tandem bike with her husband, Dan.

"I've never gone down the 'why me' road," she said of her cancer battle. "Because I know why. I'm meant to talk about this. I'm meant to help others. I'm meant to be an advocate."

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