

Redlands group Ride Yourself Fit welcomes cyclists of all levels

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Susan Goodwin, right, said she has lost more than 100 lbs. since joining Ride Yourself Fit. Courtesy Photo

REDLANDS >> Susan Goodwin was up at 6 a.m. with giddy anticipation. Today she was planning on riding her bike for 20 miles, it wasn't a big deal for her, not anymore, not after shedding more than 130 pounds.

In March of 2013, Goodwin was overweight and just received a diabetes diagnosis from her doctor, she was only in her mid 30s and knew she needed to

make changes.

Newlyweds Jason Mlot 30, and Erica Reyes 29, both diagnosed with cancer as children had developed bad eating and exercise habits after going through chemotherapy. Mlot especially had developed a love of fast food.

This month before a ride the pair was chatting about cucumber smoothies and what kind of leafy greens to add to their salad, after their 10-mile bike ride.

Faith Scaratti, 64, who beat breast cancer, was stretching out in preparation for her 15-mile trip through the streets of Redlands and Loma Linda. More than a group to ride around on a bike with what she needed was companionship and positive people in her life.

These were just a few of the stories of people who showed up for a brisk early Saturday morning bike ride at Dr. Steven Wilson's office. Wilson's plan when he started Ride Yourself Fit, six years ago with his wife Alesandra was to have an environment where people would exercise more and eat healthier but most important have their spirits uplifted.

"We're all about fun friendship and fellowship, it's kinda like church," Scaratti said laughing.

"Our whole group is about motivating beginners."

Scaratti, Mlot, Reyes and Goodwin aren't beginners anymore, each showing up for more than a year for fitness, sure, but mostly because they all believe and support one another.

"The things I have had happen to me have compromised my body, but cycling helps me forget about all that I feel, free from the things that hurt," said Scaratti. "When you come and you're around people like this all that stuff kind of disappears; you just soar past it."

Scaratti said she comes all the way from Beaumont because RYF is about more than just riding her bike.

"I just love this group when you're not here you miss it."

"Our routes are specifically set up for people who are intimidated or worried," said Steven Wilson, or Doc

as he is known around town. "I designed it like this so everyone would feel welcomed."

And that is exactly what each of the 40 or so people in attendance said they felt the moment they showed up for their first ride with Doc.

"I'm really shy but this group has been very warm," said Goodwin.

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Goodwin said when she was looking for a bike riding team to join, others were too competitive or were "just about going fast." She was more than 300 pounds and was only riding a few miles around her neighborhood but knew she would have to do better or she would become insulin dependent soon.

"My doctor was like, here's your needle, here's your medicine and I was like, no!"

After searching Google for months she showed up to one of RYF's bike rides, she said she immediately felt the difference.

"Everyone was just so nice and welcoming."

That was in November of 2013 and she has been coming ever since.

Reyes and Mlot were first patients of Doc when he noticed through evaluations that the two were not getting enough exercise and they didn't have good diets. Mlot and Reyes were especially struggling through the 10-mile bike ride, but considering both were cancer survivors, it was understandable.

"This is a big deal for us to be able to do this," said Reyes.

Reyes was diagnosed with sarcoma cancer just shy of her 10th birthday and Mlot was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia in his right leg when he was 17. Both also had picked up bad eating habits after being told for years during chemo by their doctors to eat, "whatever makes you feel better."

Even after more than 10 years of being cancer free both were, "eating a lot of Del Taco and McDonald's," especially Mlot. Goodwin was also struggling with making smart food choices.

Doc also noticed a lot of his patients had poor diets and started an organic garden in the back of his clinic. It's been three years and they now have kale, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, carrots, beets, onions, tomatoes, bell peppers, strawberries, thyme, cilantro, rosemary and chocolate mint. He gives people bags of fresh fruits and vegetables who are his patients or who ride with him.

"I tell people, this is your medicine. When you taste a tomato that's fresh, you can taste the difference," said Doc. "This is the cheapest form of health care and people aren't doing it. Patients joke with me and say I write more prescriptions for bike rides and fresh food than pills"

"I never ate salads [before Doc]," said Mlot. "Now I eat one every single day."

Everyone in attendance said that having a group of people that helps you stay fit and healthy was leading to a higher quality of life for them. Doc's wife also mentioned the health benefits of being around positive people.

"That is so important," said Alesandra Wilson.

Doc's goal when he started RYF was to have a place where people would come together as a community to support one another with their goals. They now have 450 members doing that.

"The friends you make here are special in a way that's hard to describe," said Doc. "We all share in the struggles and successes of getting fit and improving our overall health."

The team has expanded to include riders doing 70-mile rides through the mountains of Big Bear but also 2-mile family rides with children as young as 3.

They also have a bicycle safety expo every year at the end of May for children. The event drew more than 300 children last year and 50 got bikes.

Doc and his wife said they are all about community and treat everyone like family when they show up.

"This is what it's all about, being outside enjoying the scenery, getting fresh air and enjoying the company of other people."