



Valley Presbyterian Church Bicycle Riders Participate in Race Across America

Rookies Racing to Raise Awareness and Funds for Peninsula Habitat for Humanity

Valley Presbyterian Church, Portola Valley – April 14, 2008 - Cycling enthusiasts have dubbed Race Across America (RAAM) “the world’s toughest bike race.” That moniker doesn’t scare the four-person team of everyday folks from Valley Presbyterian Church (VPC), now called ‘Team H⁴’ or ‘Holy Rollers Hammering for Habitat Homes.’ In fact, Team H⁴ hopes the drama generated by the coast-to-coast race on June 11-20 and their own relative inexperience in the event will draw attention to a cause they believe in: Peninsula Habitat for Humanity, a local non-profit organization that builds affordable ownership homes for low-income families. The “ultra-distance” riders want their endurance efforts to raise \$50,000 for Peninsula Habitat. The plan may seem like an insurmountable challenge, but then securing affordable housing seems impossible to those who need it most.

“We are thrilled that Valley Presbyterian Church and the VPC bike team are supporting Peninsula Habitat in this awesome fundraising effort,” said Barbara Evans, Director of Development at Peninsula Habitat. “We are grateful for all the hard work and dedication going into the race on behalf of so many deserving families in the community.” To make a financial gift to the cause, visit the Peninsula Habitat website at www.peninsulahabitat.org and select the “VPC Race Across America” program from the online giving page.

RAAM’s 3,000-mile route begins in Oceanside, CA, and concludes in Annapolis, MD. Unlike a stage race, riders pedal twenty-four hours a day in a relay format that keeps one team member on the road while the others rest. To prepare for this grueling competition, the team has scheduled a three-day practice on May 16-18, starting from Peninsula Habitat’s current construction site on Lincoln Avenue in Redwood City. Team H⁴ riders include Rafael Ornes, Joel Phillips, Sally Phillips, and Michelle Santilhano. Sally and Joel have been VPC members since 2001. Raf is the church’s Minister of Music, while Michelle is a member of Menlo Park Presbyterian. None is a professional cyclist. While the four riders consider themselves endurance cyclists with a “thirst for something new and crazy,” they are drawing motivation for their unparalleled training and participation not from visions of glory in the winner’s circle, but from the ideal of more new Peninsula Habitat homes on the Peninsula.

To compete in such a constant and complex competition requires a hardy and organized support crew, which currently consists of Stanford student Mary Willard Elting and husband Matthew, and VPC members Anne Hubble, Cathy Paniagua, Wedding Coordinator, and Karen Russell, Associate for Church Programs. “It’s not every day that you have a chance to put your faith into action in such an extreme way,” commented VPC Pastor Mark Goodman-Morris, who will also participate as part of the support crew.

Peninsula Habitat for Humanity is a local affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International that partners with families in need, along with community volunteers and donors, to build affordable homes on the Peninsula. Peninsula Habitat homes allow families working in service, manufacturing, retail and other sectors to own decent, safe, permanent homes near their jobs. With only 19 percent of households able to afford an entry-level home, San Mateo County is one of the least affordable counties in California and scored well below the overall U.S. affordability rate of 65 percent. The median price of a first-time home is \$790,500 and requires a minimum qualifying income of \$158,100*. In 18 years, Peninsula Habitat has built more than 110 homes throughout San Mateo County.

Four church members on bikes leave one coast on an arduous journey to the opposite side of this enormous country. The ultra marathon will test them physically and spiritually and serve as a two-wheeled vehicle for generating fundraising and awareness for Peninsula Habitat. To these RAAM novices and committed missionaries, nine days and thousands of miles feels like a small price to pay, especially compared to the high price of housing beyond the reach of hard-working families in the community.

For more information and photos, please visit the Team H⁴ biking website and blog at <http://www.valleypreschurch.org/> RAAM TeamH4. For more information about the whole race, please visit the RAAM website at <http://www.raceacrossamerica.org>.

*Source: California Association of Realtors
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