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Pan-Mass. gears up to ride out weak economy

Area donations fell 15 percent



Bicyclists leaving a water stop in Wrentham during the summer's Pan-Massachusetts Challenge, which raised \$30.4 million for cancer research and treatment. (Essdras M Suarez/Globe Staff/File)

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)
Globe Correspondent / December 31, 2009

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Like others who pedal the 190-mile course from Sturbridge to Provincetown to raise money for cancer research, Watertown resident Glenn Gallo says being a part of the annual Pan-Massachusetts Challenge is about giving back to medical specialists who offered him a second chance at life.

"It's the only way I figured I could express my gratitude other than saying 'Thank you,' which I've already done," said the 44-year-old father of two, adding that he probably would not be alive without the treatment he received for tongue cancer.

Though fund-raising declined at last summer's array of rides under the Pan-Mass. umbrella, the first drop since the event began as a two-day bike ride 30 years ago, participants and organizers said they are not discouraged.

The \$30.4 million raised last summer was the third largest amount in the history of the event, which donates all proceeds to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute's Jimmy Fund, which supports adult and pediatric cancer research and care.

"A lot of money has been raised and it will help do great things. It really does make a difference," said Jamie Greacen, 52, of Groton, who has participated in the event for the past six years after his wife, Heather, was successfully treated at Dana-Farber for breast cancer.

Fund-raising fell by about 15 percent, to \$11.4 million, compared with the 2008 totals in 53 area communities, but 14 of the communities raised more money than in 2008.

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The \$42,000 collected in Maynard from the August ride was nearly double that of 2008's figure, and Boxborough raised about \$45,000 after having no riders last year. However, Newton, which has raised the most in the area the past two years, saw its fund-raising drop from about \$2 million in 2008 to about \$1.5 million last summer.

Yet a major point of optimism for Pan-Mass. organizers is that more than 230,000 people donated to the cause, a drop of just 2 percent from 2008.

"Were people scared to ask? Were people scared to give? Clearly not on any level, but they did give less," said Billy Starr, the challenge's founder and executive director. The 58-year-old Wellesley resident started the event after his mother, uncle, and cousin died of cancer.

Heather Greacen, 48, has ridden twice in the past, and this year provided fund-raising support for daughter Kelly, 17, and son Scott, 15, riding for their first time.

"It's all about knocking out cancer, and the need for that doesn't stop when we have lean financial times," said her husband, Jamie. "It's still hugely successful. We'll keep at it. Some people needed to cut back and that's fine. Others contributed more than they ever had, because they realized the need may be even greater this year."

The event has grown rapidly since its inception in 1980, when Starr led a pack of 36 cyclists across the state, raising just over \$10,000. Since then, Pan-Mass. has donated \$270 million to the Jimmy Fund, with the original route supplemented by alternate versions for adult riders and dozens more community-based events for children.

In August, 4,937 cyclists chose from among eight courses ranging from 47 to 190 miles, including the signature Sturbridge to Provincetown course. Each biker was required to raise \$1,000 to \$4,200, depending on their route, although 90 percent exceeded their minimums.

The 2010 edition of the Pan-Massachusetts Challenge, which will include two new routes, is scheduled for Aug. 7 and 8. Registration begins online Jan. 12 for returning cyclists and Jan. 19 for new participants. For details, visit www.pmc.org. ■

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