

UH Students Cycling Cross Country in Support of People with Disabilities

Written by Mike Garrity
Monday, 17 June 2013 14:56

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HOUSTON, June 17, 2013 – University of Houston students Michael Brooks and Matthew Docimo embarked on a 4,000-mile bike ride in San Francisco, Calif. on June 9. A little more than [a week in to their ride](#), they have made their way to eastern Nevada. Their goal: cycle all the way to Washington, D.C. by Saturday, August 10, in support of people with disabilities.

“People with disabilities face many challenges every day that you and I cannot imagine. But one of the most tragic barriers is a lack of understanding by our society,” said Docimo. “A simple message of empathy and acceptance is all it takes to break down this barrier, and I have committed myself to spreading this message this summer.”

Docimo, a senior supply chain management major, and Brooks, a junior construction management major, decided to spend nearly nine weeks of their summer break cycling in their fraternity’s 68-day Journey of Hope ride.

Both are members of the University of Houston’s Beta Nu chapter of the Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity. Pi Kappa Phi’s national philanthropy organization, Push America, organized the ride.

Docimo said Push America’s mission is, “To build leaders of tomorrow by serving people with disabilities today. We try to change the way society perceives those with disabilities.”

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Docimo and Brooks are riding as a part of a 26-member team of cyclists being supported by a 10-member crew, with a goal of raising more than \$650,000 for Push America's efforts to help support people living with disabilities. As of the start of their trek, Docimo has raised more than \$9,300 for Push America and Brooks has raised nearly \$6,000.

As a member of Pi Kappa Phi, Docimo said the Journey of Hope ride is not the first time he has raised funds on behalf of people with disabilities.

"I was able to participate in Give a Push Weekend (GAP) in Tulsa, Okla. in the fall of 2011. Building a jungle gym for the children of a local church and seeing them play on it was one thing, seeing the families approach the team of us with tears in their eyes will never leave my memory. Since that day, I have been motivated to continue to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. Working with the Smarty Pants Academy, a day care center for children with disabilities in Houston, has also made a huge impact," said Docimo.

Brooks, a UH construction management major, is also quick to point out that more than 54 million Americans are currently living with a disability.

"In addition to cycling all the way to Washington, D.C., we will also be reaching out to thousands of people with disabilities along the way, working to spread a message of acceptance and understanding," said Brooks.

Each day during this summer trek, after a full 30 to 120 mile bike ride, the cyclists take part in a friendship visit where they interact with people with physical and mental disabilities.

"The feeling that you get from working with them is indescribable. To try to convey the feeling we all get with words would do the experience an injustice. This has been the most humbling trip of my life," said Docimo. "We went into the Journey of Hope with the idea that we would change the lives of those we meet, but, in turn, they change ours."

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During one particularly challenging day of riding early in their journey, Brooks, Docimo and their team rode 92 miles over three California mountain passes, climbing a total of 12,000 feet.

“After 13 hours on the bike and upon completion, I couldn't help but let tears roll down knowing what our journey represents. The trip is one big metaphor. Those with disabilities cannot choose to just give up when faced with hardships. They cannot opt out of their disability. They can only do one thing and that is to push on and endure. We are doing just that, gaining empathy and understanding the whole way,” said Docimo.

Push America (<http://pushamerica.org>) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that's mission is to serve people with disabilities. It was founded in 1977 as the national philanthropy of Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity (<http://www.pikapp.org>) with the purpose of, “instilling lifelong service in its members and enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities.”

About the University of Houston The University of Houston is a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university recognized by The Princeton Review as one of the nation's best colleges for undergraduate education. UH serves the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. Located in the nation's fourth-largest city, UH serves more than 40,700 students in the most ethnically and culturally diverse region in the country.