Southern Maine Cyclists and Families Ride for Autism at KCT

BY KATELYN MICHAUD

On an unusually warm fall day, 118 bicycle riders were welcomed back to the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust by the cheers of 3-year-old Keegan. Surrounded by his family, Keegan is one of the reasons over 100 people came together to raise over $20,000 for the 11th Annual Ride for Autism. Recently diagnosed with Autism, Keegan’s family was a first-year participant in the event with four riders and an even larger team cheering on riders as they finished their ride. They raised $900 for the Autism Society of Maine.

According to Autism Speaks, a national Autism research and advocacy group, Autism is a neurological disorder that typically appears in the first three years of life. In 1993, the National Centers for Disease Control reported Autism rates of one out of every 10,000 children. Today, that statistic has ballooned to one in every 68 births. With over 1.5 million people in the United States living with some form of Autism, there’s a good chance that you or someone you know also knows someone with Autism.

With the prevalence of Autism on the rise in Maine and nationwide, the need to provide individuals with the neurological disorder and their families with the support they need continues to grow. Events like the annual Ride for Autism is geared toward providing some of that support.

Held annually in September, the Ride for Autism is one of two events that raise money for the Autism Society of Maine. For over 40 years the Autism Society of Maine has provided education and resources to support the lives of individuals on the Autism spectrum and their families. Cathy Dionne, organizer of the Ride for Autism, said “the money raised from today’s event will go to our programs, like the Autism Society of Maine’s Annual Family Retreat at Saint Joseph’s College, two Children’s Summer Camp Programs, and our Autism Information Specialist Program.”

The Ride for Autism offers three distances, 10, 25, and 50 miles, that winds through much of Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, and Arundel. While some riders are serious cyclists looking for a fun way to give back to their local community on their regular training rides, most were riding to support friends and family members with Autism.

Nathan Poore of Kennebunkport is one of the event’s founding volunteers and has ridden in the Ride for Autism all 11 years with his family. His son, Marston, has Autism and cheered his team on at both the start and finish of the ride. Once again, his team, Team Marston, was one of the top fundraisers, raising over $3,500 for the Autism Society of Maine.

Unlike the 2016 Ride for Autism, the 2017 ride happened on a beautiful sunny day. Over 118 people rode the various routes before celebrating with a BBQ lunch and prizes. One lucky rider won a brand new bike.

The Ride for Autism isn’t the only Autism Society of Maine’s fund-raising event throughout the year.

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year. Every April the Society hosts five Walk for Autism events throughout the state, including at the University of New England in Biddeford. Collectively, the five events raised over $57,000 in 2017.

All dollars raised by the Ride and Walks go to four programs the Autism Society of Maine runs, including the Children's Summer Camp Program known as Camp Summit. Every summer, the Autism Society of Maine holds a summer camp for children ages five to 15 with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Held at Camp Summit in Farmington, the summer camp program is a free program that gives children the opportunity to make friends, make crafts, and go on field trips. This year, a new summer camp for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder was held at the University of New England in Biddeford.

For many children, like Keegan and Marston, the Autism Society of Maine provides valuable resources and programs to help them grow and thrive in their communities. For more information on the Ride for Autism or the Autism Society of Maine, visit their website at www.asmonline.org.

Katelyn Michaud is a Portland-based freelance writer. She recently traveled to over 38 countries and has returned home to Maine. You can follow her adventures around Maine and the world at diariesofawanderinglobster.com.