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Bicycle ride raises funds for sport in Phila.

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They came on \$5,000 carbon-fiber racing bikes, rusty Schwinn's with wicker baskets, recumbents, tandems, fixed gears with fenders, and toddler rides with training wheels.

There were mothers and fathers with passels of kids, biking clubs in matching spandex, lithe road racers with shaved legs, weekend warriors with more than a bit of paunch.

More than 3,000 strong, they filled the streets of Center City yesterday morning, creating a stream of cyclists that flowed along a 20-mile loop that took in the Art Museum, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Chinatown, Old City, Queen Village, and up along the Schuylkill.

It was all by invitation, and with the blessing of Mayor Nutter: a group ride sponsored by the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia to raise funds and awareness of the possibilities for cycling in the city.

This was the event's third year. Two years ago, 2,400 people turned out, according to Alex Doty, executive director of the coalition. Last year, there were 3,200. This year looked to match or exceed that number, said event director Maria Dziembowska.

As a fund-raiser, it is the biggest yearly event for the bicycle coalition, which is the premier advocacy group for cycling in the region. Riders paid an average of \$55 to take part.

Among them was Lisa Nutter, the mayor's wife, an avid cyclist who rides with a female bicycle club called the Sturdy Girls.

"I think this is great," she said as she waited for the ride to start, dressed in pink-patterned Sturdy Girl cycling shorts and jersey. "It allows people to explore the city in a very different way."

Not far off were Jef and Carol Corson of Blue Bell, who sported less-official cycling attire: green-and-white Eagles jerseys.

Carol Corson, who, with a wink, claimed to be 42 but was really somewhere north of 60, lined up on a blue, single-speed beach cruiser.

"We just came up from Avalon," she said. "The back tire is rubbing the rims, my helmet's cracked, and my chain is rusty, but I'm in the race."

So, too, was 8-year-old Jenyia Nunez, who was astride a pink "slumber party" bike, which matched her pink helmet, shirt, and camouflage pants. Jenyia had come with her mother, Jenelle Gooch, 29, of Vineland, who is a teller supervisor for TD Bank, a sponsor of yesterday's event.

"They did this in New York, and we were volunteers," Gooch said, referring to herself and fellow TD Bank employee Cory Mobley, who was with her as well. "It looked like so much fun, we decided to ride it here."

With a choice of distances to ride, 10, 20, 35, or 50, Gooch said they were going for 10 miles.

"No, no, 50!" was Jenyacia's response.

There was enthusiasm as well among many nonriders who could be found along the roadside watching the early-morning show as it meandered past.

At Fourth and Race Streets, for instance, cyclists were serenaded by the choir of the Old First Reformed Church of Christ, which took the liberty of changing hymn lyrics slightly for the occasion.

"Guide my feet, while I run this race" became "Guide my feet, while I ride this race."

The ride started under cloudy skies at 8 a.m. At a little after 9, the riders who had chosen the shortest route began drifting in the start-finish area in front of the Art Museum.

The Corsons were among them, a little red in the face but largely delighted with their ride.

Carol Corson's only complaint was that she needed a better bike.

How often did she ride? "When the spirit moves her," her husband chimed in.

"Well, it is going to move more often now," she replied.

Amen.

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