

A 21 FAMILY AFFAIR

El Tour is a Multi-Generational Ride for Many Families

Article by Lisa K. Harris
Photos by Lyda Harris

El Tour de Tucson has become quality family time for many participants. With the variety of courses, from the fun-ride to the 109-mile route, family members of all age groups and skill levels can participate. For El Tour families, the weekly training and engaging dinner table conversation about equipment and ride logistics further cements family bonds. Riding in El Tour also promotes a healthy lifestyle, one all family members can benefit from.

For the Lees of Jones Ranch, New Mexico, El Tour is a family tradition. The Lees were the recipients of the 2006 El Tour Family Award.

"It just evolved in our lives," Joseph Lee, a church pastor, said. "We came to Tucson one year to visit a friend. He was riding in El Tour so we tagged along."

The 25th annual El Tour will be the seventh El Tour for Lee, his wife Dawn, and their three children, Joey, age 16, David, age 14, and Rebecca, age 12. The Lees live near Gallup and look forward to their annual trip to Tucson each November for El Tour.

"It's the only ride we participate in. And it's important we do it together as a family," Lee said. "We started with the

kiddy-ride, and worked our way up."

Dawn and Rebecca traditionally have completed the 35-mile course, while Lee and his sons have tackled a new distance each subsequent year.

"We did the 60-mile twice, because we didn't do so well the first time," Lee said. Last year, Lee and his sons completed the 109-mile route. They finished well, too. Joey earned silver and Lee and David each won bronze. "This year we plan on having a good day and we'll try to do better" than in 2006.

David Milne's family will be represented by three generations: his sons and his parents will join him on the ride.

"Riding is a great activity to do with your kids," Milne said. "We spend time together and stay fit."

Milne, a project manager with Honeywell, has ridden in the El Tour for many years as part of Honeywell's team, completing the 109-mile circuit on his Colnago bike. For his sons, Matt, 9, and Drew, 12, this will be their first El Tour. Matt and Drew will be riding the 35-mile route with their grandparents, Steve and



Tim and Ash Harris enjoy cycling together.

Bonnie Milne, also first-time El Tour entrants.

David's wife, Dana, a drama teacher at Salpointe High School, also cycles. She and David completed the 109-mile route several years ago as tandem riders. They finished the course in less than six hours, with David winning a gold medal and Dana platinum. This year, Dana is undecided about participating. "But, if the boys are going, I'll probably ride too," she said.

"I've been riding for many many years," Milne said. His interest in the sport has been infectious to other family members. "I dragged my parents into cycling when I was a competitive rider in the '80s and '90s. Now they regularly do a ride in Colorado near their home, from Rico to Dolores, about a 50-mile trip."

Enthusiasm about El Tour is high with Mike Harris and his family, where, like the Milne family, three generations will be participating. Harris has a long history with the event. "Health

America, where I served as CEO, was the first corporate sponsor of the El Tour de Tucson," Harris said. "Since then, I've always been a supporter of the ride."

This year, Harris and his 12-year old grandson, Nicholas Bowman, will ride the 35-mile route, both for the first time. "Richard DeBernardis (Perimeter Bicycling president and El Tour founder who has many family members of his own in the event) convinced me to ride. I'm really looking forward to it," Harris said.

The grandfather-grandson team trains twice a week. Every Saturday they ride along the Rillito River for 12 – 15 miles and on Tuesdays they participate in interval training at the gym. "Riding is a great way to get extra exercise," Bowman said.

Harris and Bowman will be joined on El Tour by at least three other family members, including Harris's son, Tim, who plans on completing the 109-mile course, and Tim's two children, Emma, 7, and Ash, 5, who will participate in the fun-ride. Mike Harris hopes a sixth family member, his son-in-law and Nicholas's father, will join them if he is

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The Milne Family spending quality time together, from left, Drew, Dana, Dave, and Matt.

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back in the country in time. Col. Clifford Bowman, currently serving in Afghanistan as an A-10 pilot with the U.S. Air Force, is based at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.

"We're hoping Nicholas's dad will be back home and ready to ride with us in El Tour," Harris said. In addition to flying, Col. Bowman cycles. "When he's at home, he rides his bike from his house in the foothills to work at DM, and then back in the evening," his mother-in-law, Charlotte Harris, said.

The 2007 El Tour marks Tim Harris's second participation in the event as a rider. Last year he completed the 35-mile course and this year he'll try his skills on the long course. Like his father, Tim Harris has supported El Tour in the past. A native Tucsonan, Harris volunteered to help El Tour during college, but it was only four or five years ago that he picked up a bike and made participating in the event a goal.

"I've had a dream to complete the 109-mile ride," Tim Harris said. "It's the 25th year of the event. If there ever was a year to do it, this is it."

his lucky Schwinn to his father, Mike.

"The Tour is a big deal for us," Tim Harris said. "My kids see me training and have become interested, too. They enjoy riding bikes. Like me, my kids started riding early." His youngest son, Ash, will ride his Spiderman bike, equipped with training wheels, in the El Tour Fun-Ride. Cycling "is something you learn at a young age. It's the next best thing to flying, and if you can keep it up, it (cycling) carries into adulthood," Tim Harris said.

Ash is looking forward to El Tour. To train for the fun-ride, he rides to the bus stop and around the driveway. He enjoys ringing its bell and proclaims riding "will grow muscles."

In addition to training with the Honeywell team, Milne trains with his two sons once or twice a week. "My kids and I average 10 - 15 miles each practice session," Milne said. "We go out every weekend and have fun around the neighborhood." Milne regularly takes his sons to Fantasy Island, a mountain bike course with 19-miles of trails on six

The Lees now ride road bikes. "We started with mountain bikes," Lee said. "Two years ago on the 80 (mile course), one biker zipped by

us and shouted 'don't you think you should upgrade those bikes.' I watched him fly by. I didn't know how to take his words but decided he was offering a kindly suggestion." Lee's son Joey now has a Specialized bike, a gift from his uncle, and hopes for a stronger finish this year, to place higher than his 2006 silver finish in the 109-mile course.

El Tour has become a family activity for the Milne, Harris, and Lee families. Spending time with each other and staying fit were reasons given for making El Tour part of their lives. Preparing to ride in EL Tour offers plenty of dinner table conversation, not to mention reliving the memories after the ride and planning for an even greater finish next year. *✍️*

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Ash Harris, third generation El Tour participant, and his Spiderman bike.



The Milne Family rides along the Rillito River Park.

One of Harris's inspirations is a fellow member of his Catalina Rotary Chapter, "who despite being older is a champion Ironman triathlete. I figure if he can do it, I can do it." For Tim Harris, the 109-mile El Tour ride represents a significant challenge. "I want to find out if I'm up to it. It's a big step to ride a bike over a hundred miles."

"My two kids are excited we're riding in El Tour together," Tim Harris continued. Last year they cheered from the sidelines, holding a banner that read, "You Go Daddy," and staking out a spot along the route where they could catch a glimpse of their father as he pedaled by on his Schwinn. This year, Harris has traded up to a Trek, and given

loops, located near Harrison and Irvington roads in southeastern Tucson. "It's a great place to practice with my sons," Milne said.

The Lee family trains near their home in New Mexico. Lee is a firm believer in strengthening the mind, body, and spirit. "Cycling is a something great to do together as a family," Lee said, "Although now my boys are way out in front of me." The Lees practice two to three times a week, "mostly two because of all other things we have to do." They spend one practice session on a short ride and the second on a longer ride. "We try to make the longer ride longer each week. We'll work up to 80-85 miles by the beginning of November," Lee said.