

## “Tour de NCNC” bicyclists ride for OCWM and Puente Ministry

Russ and Sheila Stevens’ dream came true Saturday, Aug. 7, when they rode their bikes into the parking lot of their home church, First, Palo Alto. With 11 other riders they had completed a 325-mile ride around the San Francisco Bay, staying at UCC churches and raising money for Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM).

“We are avid cyclists, always looking for ways to combine outreach, biking and the UCC,” said Russ. “When I was in high school, I went on several weeklong bike trips around New England sponsored by the Connecticut UCC Conference. In 1998, my wife and I were counselors for a Cross Country UCC bike trip (sponsored by the Connecticut Conference). Eleven high school youth and five adults participated in this ride.

“Ever since then, we have wanted to organize our own trip. Our goal is to create an environment that combines cycling with a deliberate community of faith such that people grow in both their faith life and in their love of cycling.”

On Sunday, Aug. 1, Russ and Sheila, the other riders and five support people with the van, received a blessing after church from Rev. David Howell and members of First, Palo Alto.

The first-ever “Tour de NCNC” had begun.



By the time they got home seven days later, more than 50 NCNC members at eight different churches had welcomed them with food, showers, bed, encouragement, donations to OCWM and gifts of 20 used bikes.

The bikes, carried in the support van, were donated to agricultural workers in the small coastal town of Pescadero. While planning the trip, Russ heard about Community, Pescadero’s ministry to the agricultural workers, Puente de la Costa Sur, which includes donating free bikes.

Rev. Wendy Taylor of Puente invited the riders and the workers to share dinner and the bikes. It



“Tour de NCNC”: Riders and supporters gather at Little Brown Church UCC, Sunol, where they spent the first night: Left to right, front: Susan Davis, Russ Stevens, Shirley Gruber. Left to right, back: Art Reichert, Adam Furlong, Sheila Stevens, Abby Stanley, Daniel Furlong, Bryan Furlong, Mike Davis, Betsy Penick. Top: Saddle up and ride! Left: Members of First, Palo Alto youth group, Abby Stanley and Betsy Penick.

was a moving conclusion to a profound week.

This mission focus of the ride was central to Russ and Sheila’s vision. Supporters made pledges and gifts of more than \$2,000 to Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) in honor of the riders.

“When Russ came to our youth group and told us about the ride, we thought it would be a cool new experience,” recalls 14-year-old Abby Stanley of First, Palo Alto.

“Russ and Sheila are the best. It was fantastic doing it with my friend Betsy Penick from church. Every night on the ride we spent time as a group reflecting on the day. At one church the minister took us to his home so we could shower. I’m glad we’re helping other people too with the donated bikes.”

Rev. Nancy Peters from First, San Jose, first read about the ride in The Pacific. “I’m committed to helping the Conference whenever I can to call attention to the essential work they do. I also love biking, and I have done trips across the country. But this trip was on roads I’ve never been on, and beautiful. It couldn’t have been better. I hope we do it again next

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## NCNC team empowered at National Youth Event

### 3,500 UCC youth get “E-attitude” in Knoxville

Thirty-eight Northern California Nevada Conference teens attended the UCC National Youth Event (NYE) July 22-26 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. The youth, from seven different churches, worshipped, sang, prayed, learned, served and had fun with 3,500 other youth from across the UCC. NYE is held every four years for youths ages 14 to 18.

“It was amazing to be with thousands of youth from all over the country so different from me,

but alike also. I didn’t have to explain UCC to anyone!” says Katy States from First, Sonoma.

The teens and their eight adult leaders were from Congregational, Danville; First, Redwood City; Community, San Carlos; Community, Sebastopol; First, Santa Rosa; Sierra Arden, Sacramento; and First, Sonoma.

Each day began with Bible study. Workshops followed, on topics like environmental justice, peace movements, the spiritual concepts in The Simpsons, and the theology in Lord of the Rings and other current cinema. The adults attended workshops on how to engage youth in worship, updated music ideas, intriguing Bible studies and how to help youth “totally

relate” to Christianity and the UCC.

The theme, based on Romans 12:2, was “E-attitude” which stood for being enlightened, encouraged, embraced and empowered.

Rev. Laura Barnes of Congregational, Danville, appreciated the emphasis on “God is Still Speaking.”

“We explored how many ways and through how many diverse and unique people God is still speaking; through young people, through African Americans, through those who are blind, through gays and lesbians, through many, many others who are considered somehow ‘different’ from the mainstream. And we heard their voices throughout the week-

end! I love the diversity of our denomination!”

Barnes was moved by the experience of worshipping with 3,500 youth. “It was a powerful experience to sing, pray and worship with all those young people. They sure can sing (and clap and move at the same time)! The arena was full of spirit and the Spirit was definitely among us. Ken Medema, a local Bay Area musician, lead us in worship and opening music every time we gathered. He was inspirational, current and able to create song lyrics applicable to the day’s events right on the spot.

“Youth were all challenged to voice their opinions about issues See NATIONAL YOUTH on Page C2

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