

*something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue*

## **JohnnyRide 2011**

John Durand

The route that JohnnyRide 2011 followed was old, but much was new about our annual fund-raising bike ride (our eighth!). We had new riders, a new ride headquarters, a new main menu, a new display of scholarship winners, and (also new) kind of icky weather.

This year's Johnnyride on September 17 was one of the earliest in Wisconsin's normally beautiful, early falls, but the day was overcast, chilly, and a bit windy. As a result, riders wore an extra layer or two. For my part, over a tee shirt, I wore a biking shirt, a down vest, a windbreaker, double gloves, and long pants over my biking shorts. But maybe I'm just a sissy. Tom Olson of Madison, Wisconsin worked up some body heat on one of the early hills, and rode the rest of the way wearing only a tee shirt and shorts.

### **The Gathering**

I so enjoy seeing the cars, vans, and pick-ups pull in before the ride, many with bike racks holding kid-size bikes. Not only is the number of arrivals gratifying, but it is such a treat to see new faces emerge from the vehicles to join the ride and share the day. This year, we had several, including our first "locals" – Carl and Faye Leupke, of Hudson, Wisconsin. They saw a poster advertising the up-coming JohnnyRide, and called DHF chair Ellen Olson to say that they wanted to come. (Ellen had put up posters in the area, and dropped off news releases at several local papers, also new things for JohnnyRide 2011.)

Considerably after 10 a.m. (we *never* seem to get started on time), Tonya Schmitt, a certified yoga instructor who lives in nearby Hammond, Wisconsin, led the assembly through loosening-up exercises. After several minutes, her young son whispered a request in Tonya's ear – shy Gus thought we should finish by everyone doing "the Lion's Roar," evidently his favorite yoga exercise. Following Tonya's lead, everyone made terrible faces, stuck out their tongues, made hands like claws, and roared like lions. It was just the thing to get us on our bikes in good humor.

### **The Ride**

Some twenty-five riders – young and old – set off on the 23-mile loop route that reaches the halfway point in Glenwood City. Under the watchful eyes of their moms and dads, some of the youngest riders went just a short distance before turning back. They would have more fun "back at the ranch," anyway. However, one of the young riders, Jed Durand, age ten, rode the entire loop, accompanied by his dad, Paul. For mile after mile, Jed's dad encouraged him to pedal "just a little farther." Congratulations, Jed and Paul! For Jed's achievement, he received the coveted Floppy Cow Award, a traveling trophy that he can keep until next year's JohnnyRide.

JohnnyRide is not a race, of course. It is mostly a social event for a good cause. But first back after riding the entire route was Andrew Keppel, just one hour, thirty-nine minutes, and thirty-seven seconds later. Andrew, of course, has the advantage of being kind of a young fella, of working out regularly, and also the advantage of working for Life Time Fitness, a nationwide chain of health clubs (where Andrew mostly uses his highly developed brain, and not so much his well-tuned body). According to a report generated by one of his fancy electronic devices (it may have been his wristwatch, but he had wires draped all over his body, so I am not sure which device it was), Andrew set off at 10:35 a.m., and reached a maximum heart rate of 175 beats per minute on the ride, no doubt on that hill coming out from Glenwood City that I have grown to hate. Remarkably, he burned 1,520 calories, which surely was enough to offset JohnnyRide's delicious and generous lunch, and two or three desserts besides.

Eventually, we all returned from the ride, including first-time riders (and finishers) Jennifer Olson-Bayoumi, visiting from San Rafael, California, and Michelle Miller, of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. A tip o' the biking helmet to them both for their feat. And a tip o' the helmet to the other women riders, too – regular finishers Marilyn Durand and Ellen Olson, and newcomer Faye Leutke. And to nine-year-old Libby Keppel, who rode off and on, and finished the ride in tandem with her dad, Andrew. For my part, when I returned (glad to be done!), I was gratified by the sight of many more vehicles parked around the ride headquarters, a sign that we again would have a good turnout for the JohnnyRide lunch.

### **The Lunch**

Everyone gathered in the big assembly room of Carr Creek Ranch, just a couple hundred yards from the home of Bob and Ellen Olson, our previous ride headquarters. Owned and operated by Marvin and Sharon Utecht, Carr Creek Ranch has accommodated country music festivals for years, and answered very well for the needs of JohnnyRide. Besides having a big yard for parking cars, and a big assembly room for dining and socializing (heated that day by a propane furnace), the assembly room has kitchen facilities *à la* a church basement. All of this was just fine for finishing up and setting out the splendid, eye-popping variety of provided and brought dishes, and for Jack and Anna Webber to put the final touches on the main course of their outstanding, delicious, barbequed pork ribs (which they generously donated).

Upwards of fifty folks, young and old, enjoyed the late lunch of ribs, shredded turkey, baked beans, hot dishes, cole slaw, several salads, rolls, Johnnycake (another new thing!), plus the usual array of fresh-cut vegetables and accompaniments. A separate table was burdened with cakes and cookies and candies of all kinds.

What a wonderful day for the kids! For the rest of the afternoon, they made their way to the dessert table any time they wanted for another cookie or brownie or handful of candy! Ah, life is sometimes good!

While folks were finishing up their lunches and visiting over coffee, Marvin Utecht pulled his tractor around to the front door, hauling a trailer with a dozen hay bales arranged as seats to give the kids (and a few not-kids) a hayride round the extensive acreage of Carr Creek Ranch.

### **The Raffle**

For several years, the Green Bay Packers organization has provided JohnnyRide with a special football to be used as part of the fund-raising effort. White, and spattered with the signatures of all the coaches and players (and their jersey numbers), the football is much coveted in the land of Cheeseheads. It is usually considered the premier prize among the many donations received for the JohnnyRide raffle. But this year's football was special. It was adorned with the signatures of the 2011 Super Bowl Champions! What a collector's item! Who would not desire it? Who would win it?

Each dollar donated to JohnnyRide earns a raffle ticket...a \$50 donation earns 50 tickets, and 50 chances to win the football, or one of a dozen other prizes. Of course, it is always a scramble to get all the ticket numbers recorded and the tickets torn from the roll and thoroughly stirred in a big pot. Sometimes, eyes wide with anticipation at seeing the Green Bay Packers football and the table laden with raffle prizes, folks will hurry up at the last minute to donate another \$10 or \$20 and get 10 or 20 more raffle tickets, just to increase their chances of winning. Or, perhaps just to donate a little extra to the scholarship fund.

This year's winner of the Green Bay Packers football was Stuart Durand. His being only five years old, it is understandable that Stuart seemed a bit bewildered by the excitement and laughter

at his good fortune. Plus, he did not seem to be very excited – perhaps because the Green Bay Packers and the Super Bowl do not loom very large (if at all) in his universe.

But Stuart's dad, Peter, who made another generous donation to JohnnyRide and distributed the ticket numbers among his three kids, could hardly wait to get his hands on the coveted prize. Last time I saw the football, it was not in Stuart's bedroom at home, or in a bin of outdoor toys in their garage. Instead, it was perched on a shelf in Peter's home office in a special Plexiglas display case. Supposedly, Peter is keeping Stuart's football in a safe place until Stuart is a little older. Or until he has forgotten that it is really *his* football.

### **The Aftermath**

So many people help to make JohnnyRide a fun and successful event, it is hard to name them without fear of not naming everyone. Indeed, to my mind, those who come to JohnnyRide to bring something for the meal or the raffle, or simply to enjoy the food and visiting, or send donations because they believe in the cause, are just as important as the riders and workers. As one such person later wrote about JohnnyRide 2011: "What a special day that was...where we all gather together for such a special purpose." How could we not take great satisfaction in the knowledge that JohnnyRide has become "a special day"?

This year's "special day" once again raised almost \$3,500 for the DHF scholarship fund. Some of that money will be used to pay for such expenses as signage and tee shirts and porta-potty rental. Some will be reserved to award the 2012-2013 DHF scholarships next May. And some will be held in a long-term reserve, so that DHF can continue awarding scholarships well into the future.