

Push across America for Journey of HOPE

Cyclists raising
funds for

disabled stop in Havasu enroute to D.C.



By **DAVID BELL**
TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD



Anthony Varona called the Journey of Hope "the best thing I ever did." The Pi Kappa Phi fraternity member, along with about 30 other frat brothers, are peddling more than 4,000 miles cross-country, raising money for, and awareness of, the issues facing the disabled. "This has taught me to go into everything with an open mind. I can learn from everything," Varona said. The Journey of Hope is part of the Push America program, a community service effort the Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity stages each year. The cyclists gather in San Francisco

and Seattle to begin the trek to Washington D.C. The South Route and Transamerica teams start together in San Francisco before splitting in Nevada. The North Route Team will link with the Transamerica team once in Colorado then split off again until all three converge on the nation's capital. The South Route team averaged 75 miles per day as they spent the first two weeks of the trip making their way to Lake Havasu City. "In Nevada, we dealt with the heat, lack of scenery and boredom. And then we get here and Lake Havasu City has been so hospitable," said rider Joey Bryce. The local Journey of Hope Committee coordinated with other Lake Havasu City groups, such as the Lamb of God Lutheran Church and **London Bridge Yacht Club**, as well as the city, Convention and Visitors Bureau and businesses such as the London Bridge Resort, to give the riders an extra day's respite. Riders camped out in the Community/Aquatic Center and were feted with luncheons and barbecues, including a community dinner that saw hundreds pack in to the Community Center Sunday. **The yacht club gave the riders an on-the-water tour of Lake Havasu** Sunday afternoon and the CVB was able to get local businesses to contribute to a gift bag for each rider with personal items they could use on the trip, such as soaps, talcum powder and toothpaste. "We come here, after riding through the hot desert, and it's like an oasis," said Project Manager Bradley Bodiford. "You guys couldn't be nicer." Bodiford also rode in the Journey of Hope in 2005. He told the riders what they could expect as they wrap up their journey in Washington D.C. He said all three team will meet at a park about two miles outside of the city then peddle in together. "Then you go up to the capital steps and the people are there, yelling and clapping. You're so happy because you realize you finally did it. Suddenly, you're there," said Bodiford. Before it all ends Aug. 11, the riders have the chance to meet fellow frat members from across the country, and make new friends along the way. "At our last stop, in Las Vegas, we went to Adventure Dome. And we all had a disabled buddy that we were partnered with. To see the smiles on their faces and hear them say thanks for a fun day, I'd do this all over again," said Cameron Lagrone. The riders will spend this morning at the New Horizons Center, meeting and talking with people with developmental disabilities and then have the rest of the day to relax. Then it's back on the road. "This is one of the few two-day stops for the boys," said Tanya Swearingen with the local Journey of Hope Committee. "The boys all speak to each other about Havasu and they want to come here." The riders were given a heroes welcome Sunday, with three Lake Havasu City Firefighters – Mark Beals, Capt. Rich Goodwin and Mark Martz – riding bikes with the team from the Lake Havasu City northern border. There was also a fire engine and team posted at each intersection along State Route 95, cheering the riders. At Classic Burger, for the final leg to the Community Center, a local disabled rider joined the group of cyclists. "The great thing about what these boys do is they focus more on the ability than the disability," said committee member Beverley Scott. The Journey of Hope will raise more than \$500,000, with each rider raising a minimum of \$5,000 each. As they travel across the country, the riders will participate in a charity game of wheel chair basketball, perform a puppet show for children and take part in a friendship dance. "What I hope to take from this, what I can tell my kids, is that you treat people with disabilities as people first," said Josh Greer. "And there's no better way to teach than to do."

Online at <http://www.pushamerica.org>.