



JOHN ZAWACKI, WWW.JZSTUDIOS.COM

THE RIDERS OF SEMINOLE

The **Seminole Cyclists** come together for cycling and community causes, making sure no rider gets left behind.

By William Richards

A huge crowd of riders in multi-colored bicycle jerseys rolls onto the morning streets of **Lake Mary** on spinning wheels. What was once a small band of friends has become a massive force for good in their community—the **Seminole Cyclists**.

“Anytime anybody needs something, we’re always there to volunteer,” **Susan Deal**, **Seminole Cyclists** member, says.

After learning a woman close

to one of Deal’s friends was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), she dedicated herself to cycling the MS 150 to raise money against the devastating illness. She had only six weeks to train for the bike tour, and the short-distance cycling rides of her first biking group weren’t enough to prepare her.

Deal met a **Seminole Cyclists** member at a local bike shop in Lake Mary and started cycling with them the very next Saturday. Her beginner ride was a 20-mile non-stop ride at speeds ranging

from 15 to 18 mph.

“No rider gets left behind” is the group’s motto. Ride leaders will fall back at a slower pace with winded beginners until they can muster their energy to rejoin the group. The **Seminole Cyclists** typically ride in average groups of 20 people at 20 mph in multiple single-file pace lines.

With help from the **Seminole Cyclists**, Deal completed the MS 150 tour. Now she continues to ride with the group and organize their community service initiatives.

What a Group Can Do

Seminole Cyclists members have provided care packages for U.S. military, adopted and cleaned up roads in their community, donated bikes for kids, painted the house of a disabled soldier and helped the Boy Scouts earn merit badges. Members participate in the MS 150, Tour de Cure and the Lance Armstrong LiveStrong century rides. They’ve also raised tens of thousands of dollars for charity while remaining a non-dues paying, non-profit non-club.

“We’re not an organization—even a non-profit organization,” **Matt Cannavino**, **Seminole Cyclists** president, says. “We’re just a group of people who like to cycle and like to give back to the community.”

Cannavino discovered **Seminole Cyclists** while taking a spin class hosted by the group’s founder, **Doug Unger**. With a little encouragement from Unger, Cannavino bought his first **Cannondale** bike and hit the road.

The coaching and “at a boys” the beginner rider got from the other members on his first day made him feel part of the group immediately. “Everyone is constantly making sure that you’re feeling comfortable during the ride, that you’re getting the type of guidance that you need to be successful in cycling,” Cannavino says.

Cycling opened his eyes to the beauty of his local environment. Cannavino says he still enjoys taking in the scenery around Lake Jesup and Clermont. On one particular ride, his pace line passed a bald eagle sitting in the road. The bird remained stoic and motionless as it watched the cyclists rush on into the countryside.

Leading the Pack

With greater experience, Cannavino started leading the charge. Becoming a ride leader, he guided his fellow cyclists on Tuesday and Thurs-

day morning rides. Safety in the face of hard concrete and other cycling hazards became a regular topic of his ride leader speeches. Cannavino says he always ensures that the **Seminole Cyclists** he’s leading enjoy a safe and fun environment.

The groups that Cannavino leads have continued to grow. With the support of bike shops and a cycling culture he describes as unusually large for a relatively small region, the ranks of **Seminole Cyclists** keep swelling. According to him, as many as 70 people have rolled out on a single trip. For his leadership skills, Unger appointed Cannavino **Seminole Cyclists’** president this year.

Six years ago, Spin Master Unger started the **Seminole Cyclists** out of the J. Douglas Williams YMCA in Lake Mary, where he taught spin class. A tiny group of three grew to six, then eight, then 12, and over the years, the group has mushroomed into its presently impressive numbers.

With Cannavino taking the reins, Unger remains proud of the friendships he’s built, the fun times he’s had and the charitable service he has given back to the community. He continues to ride with the friendly cycling movement he set out to create. “Most of us are in the same frame of mind,” Unger says. “We’ve got kids; we’ve got family. We don’t want to take away, so we usually do our rides early.”

Unger estimates that 30 percent of **Seminole Cyclists** members are female, and the majority of riders are between age 30 and 40. The youngest member is 15, and

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the oldest members are in their 60s and 70s.

The **Seminole Cyclists** are more than meets the eye. The lifelong friendships and community charity these cycling enthusiasts share with one another creates a selfless synergy that makes our community a better place—beginning on Lake Mary’s morning streets. **L**

Read about, and see photos from, other **Central Florida** cyclists at CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com.



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The **Seminole Cyclists** hit the streets of Lake Mary on wheels as well as give back to our community as a group of people who really care.