

Bikers raise funds to help sick kids

Four men will ride in 12-hour St. Jude Children's Research Hospital fundraiser

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By Loni Ingraham

Four Lutherville men are mountain-biking on the trails around Loch Raven Reservoir to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

"All four of us are blessed with healthy kids," said Brad Potterfield, who will be riding 12 straight hours Aug. 11 with Phil Yakim, Jeff Orbin and Rob Lynch.

"When I learned of the tremendous things that St. Jude accomplishes for kids not as fortunate, I decided to get involved," he said.

Since 1962, the hospital, in Memphis, Tenn., has been one of the world's premier centers for research and treatment of catastrophic diseases in children, primarily pediatric cancers.

Its mission has been to advance cures and means of prevention for catastrophic pediatric diseases through research and treatment.

Each year, St. Jude sees 4,900 patients, from all 50 states and from more than 70 countries. None is denied treatment on the basis of race, religion or a family's ability to pay. Most are treated on a continuing outpatient basis as part of ongoing research programs.

It was Potterfield, a national accounts manager for Abacus Corp., who spearheaded the "12 Hours for St. Jude" fundraiser after a chance encounter at an airport in Atlanta.

He was sitting alone in a crowded lounge when a man wearing a St. Jude shirt asked to share his table, and they struck up a conversation.

The man had been to St. Jude to visit his best friend's son, who

had a rare cancer.

"He told me that visiting St. Jude was an incredible experience, one that changed his life," Potterfield recalled. "He told me about the superior treatment the children receive and how the spirits of all who go there are lifted.

"He said he would always be a St. Jude supporter because of that experience."

They exchanged business cards when they said good-bye, but later, when Potterfield returned home and decided to send the man a note, he couldn't find the business card.

But "I do not believe that this meeting was a simple coincidence," Potterfield said. "I think as a person gets older they start to understand how precious life really is, and we have a true responsibility to help others in a positive way.

"It was a reminder that the time to act is now."

Potterfield spread the message of St. Jude's work with sick children to his mountain biking buddies, who quickly signed on to ride for a cure.

All four men have begun securing individual pledges as well as corporate sponsorships for the event.

"I do not want to imagine a scenario where a life-threatening illness affected my family," Potterfield said. "But I know that it happens to people just like me every day."

Their goal is to create an ongoing campaign to raise funds for St. Jude, he said. The mountain bike relay Aug. 11 is the first step toward this goal. He is inviting other teams to ride as well.

Donations are pledged on an hourly rate and based on completed hours, Potterfield said. One hundred percent of the donations, which are tax deductible, will be sent directly to the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

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