

Taylor/Longsjo History Ride

Cyclists ride from Fitchburg to Worcester

By Kate Czaplinski

FITCHBURG -- Four local cyclists geared up early Wednesday morning for a 45-mile ride from Fitchburg to Worcester.

Ed Collier, George Gantz, Bill Chiarchiaro and Anne O'Connor are organizers of the upcoming Longsjo Classic bike race.

The Taylor/Longsjo History Ride Wednesday honored Fitchburg's own Olympian Arthur Longsjo and "Worcester's Whirlwind," Marshall "Major" Taylor. Both are top names in the sport and both have roots in Worcester County.

"This is a fantastic way to commemorate two of the greatest cyclists that ever lived," said Gantz, the Fitchburg Cycling Club president and senior vice president at Unital. "We're going to touch the Art Longsjo Memorial before we leave and touch the Major Taylor memorial when we get there."

The upcoming Fitchburg Longsjo Classic will bring hundreds of racers to the area July 3 through July 6. The four-day stage race takes cyclists from Fitchburg to the top of Mount Wachusett at different points. It attracts serious caliber cyclists.

Several of the classic's racers have gone on to compete in international races, including Lance Armstrong, who won the classic in 1992.

Chiarchiaro, the director of operations for the Longsjo, handed out last-minute granola bars to fellow riders Gantz, Collier and O'Connor before they left from the Longsjo Memorial on Main Street.

"It's a great excuse to go cycling in the middle of the work week," Chiarchiaro said laughing.

The group left Fitchburg just after 8 a.m.

Longsjo's widow, Terry Longsjo Brackett, accompanied the cyclists by car from Fitchburg to Worcester. Collier noted that Longsjo and Taylor have a lot in common.

"Art (Longsjo) and Major Taylor have a lot of similarities," Collier said. "They came from similar economic backgrounds and they both had their own struggles in life."

Taylor became a world champion cyclist in 1899. He was the second African American world champion in history.

"Major Taylor was born in Indiana, where he wasn't allowed to race because he was black," Collier said. "He moved to Worcester where he found more acceptance."

Cyclists gathered in downtown Worcester at noon on Wednesday to dedicate Major Taylor's monument, titled



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From left, Ed Collier and Bill Chiarchiaro bike down state Route 31 in Fitchburg on their way to Worcester on Wednesday for the Taylor/Longsjo History Ride.

"Worcester's Whirlwind." The sculpture, designed by artist Tobias Mendez, is the city's first monument to an African American.

Famous athletes Greg LeMond and Edwin Moses were guests at the ceremony.

LeMond is a three-time Tour de France winner and Moses is a three-time Olympic medalist.

The Fitchburg group's route took them up state Route 31 into Princeton, where they planned to meet up with the Seven Hills Wheelmen cycling club.

"Cyclists from this area are fairly close-knit," Collier said.

The group then traveled through Holden all the way to Worcester for the memorial's dedication ceremony at the Worcester Public Library.

Collier projected Wednesday's ride to take about two-and-a-half hours.

Collier said the history ride represented another step toward the Longsjo Classic.

"We want to remind people," Collier said. "The Longsjo is coming up."