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Journey of the heart passes through Socorro

by Elva K. Österreich | July 19, 2012 | Filed under: Breaking News



Ben Maenza and Troy McLehany stop to rehydrate in San Antonio Tuesday during the fundraising Ride for Hope.

When Marine Lance Cpl. Ben Maenza came back from Afghanistan in October of 2010, he found himself alone in a hospital, clothes gone, legs removed.

Then the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund stepped in, flying his family in to be with him, buying him essential clothes and providing moral support in the form of a caring individual visiting and talking with him weekly during his hospitalization.

“This is a genuine non-profit,” Maenza said. “They show up when you need them. Ninety-five percent of the contributions go to the veterans.”

So it was no surprise that when Maenza met a group who intended to cross the country on recumbent tricycles to raise money for the Semper Fi Fund, he insisted on joining them.

The cause keeps the team motivated. Three of them have served as Marines and the fourth is the son of a 1940s-era Marine. Now into the sixth week of their cross-country journey, the four-man team is taking two-by-two turns on their tricycles and came through Socorro on their Florida to San Diego journey Tuesday, stopping for the night before continuing up through Magdalena.

After 1,700 miles through the southern states in midsummer, the team values its time on and off of the pedals.

“There is nothing that happens in this country that doesn’t ride on the shoulders of guys like Ben,” rider John Gerlaugh said. “They rise and put themselves in danger in a far away place for the very fuzzy notion of democracy and freedom.”

The team will have covered more than 2,700 miles from East to West coast when they are done. So far, more than 300 contributions to the Semper Fi Fund has brought in more than \$55,000. The Ride for Heroes can be followed at facebook.com/semperfi.rideforheroes . Donations can be made at www.rideforheroes.stayclassy.org.

See the Saturday, July 21, edition of *El Defensor Chieftain* for the full story.