

Dog Lover Prepares for Bike Ride With a Cause

He hopes the 700-mile ride will raise \$100,000 for an assistance dog training group.

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A man's 11-day bike ride along 700 miles of California coastline will include rallies in a variety of cities for Canine Companions for Independence, a nonprofit organization that provides highly trained assistance dogs to adults and children. Bruce Ross, 55, says his goal is to raise \$100,000 along the way.

His journey kicks off in Santa Rosa and he says he'll bike an average of 60 miles a day, and as many as 100 miles on some days. Joining him on his trip will be Zena, his adopted puppy for the past 16 months. Zena, a Golden Retriever-Lab mix, will ride along in a support van.

The most difficult part of the trip, Ross says, will be returning Zena to the program so she could be matched with a family. Letting go of the puppy that he volunteered to raise for the program, however, was part of the deal.

Ross, of Irvine, Calif., has raised two puppies for CCI. After he turns them in, the dogs then go through a six-month advanced training before they are matched with a suitable companion.

"We get a puppy at 8 weeks old, keep it for 16 months and make the perfect dog, and then they take it away," he says. "When you see the incredible miracles these dogs perform in people's lives, the question becomes, how could I not [part with the dog]?"

He says he has seen autistic children become more social as a result of bonding with a dog, as well as stroke victims who have made great strides to regain movement. The best part, he says, is that the dogs are provided at no charge to people that need them.

His inspiration to help people with disabilities stems from an 18-year bond he shared with his Golden Retriever, Sierra. For that breed to live that long was a miracle, he says, and it's fulfilling to help provide the gift of assistance dogs.

The bike ride starts May 17 and ends May 31 in Oceanside, Calif. At that point, Ross will present a check to CCI for the funds raised on his trip, and he'll turn in Zena for advanced training. He says he will volunteer to raise a fourth puppy for the group.

Aside from his passion for the cause, Ross says there's another motivating force for what he's embarking on: "Probably a little bit of insanity."

For more information on the Ride for CCI, visit www.cci.org/rideforcci or call 800-572-2275.