

BIKING FOR A CAUSE

“Converting calories into gas, a bicycle gets the equivalent of three thousand miles per gallon.”

- Bill Strickland

Just ten months after a surgery that removed only half of his brain tumor, Gary Bonacker rode alongside Lance Armstrong at the Ride for the Roses cycling event in Austin, Texas. The experience so impacted Gary that he returned to his hometown of Bend, Oregon, and established a multi-distance cycling event – Tour des Chutes, named after the Deschutes River running through the middle of town.

That first Tour, held in July 2005, raised a little over \$42,000 for the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF). After a second successful Tour des Chutes in 2006, Gary and his friend and lymphoma survivor, Andrew Crosby, began brainstorming about the possibility of funding a local cancer survivorship program. Both men agreed that it would have been helpful to fall back on the experiences of someone who had walked the path ahead of them.

The 2007 Tour des Chutes brought in close to \$56,000 and because of two bike enthusiasts’ confrontation with cancer, there is now someone on staff at the local hospital dedicated to growing a program that will offer well-rounded support to survivors of all types of cancers.

Silly Putty egg

Gary first came to Bend on a break from school. 35 years later, he is co-owner of the popular bike shop, Sunnyside Sports, where he started out as a bike mechanic.

In the spring of 2003, Gary began having seizures. An MRI showed a Stage 2 tumor about the size and shape of a Silly Putty egg in his brain—“An oligodendroglioma,” said Gary, rolling the word smoothly off his tongue.

“A what?!” He patiently spelled it out for me.

Brain surgery was scheduled with a surgeon in Seattle who had performed 1,500 of these procedures.

Awake craniotomy

Gary was awake during surgery, which allows the surgeon to probe and observe how it affects the patient. An *awake craniotomy*, as Gary explained it, involves being anesthetized while the scalp is ...