



Fighting Diabetes, One Mile At A Time

By James Stout

The Pascua Yaqui Tribe (PYT) has two teams of riders that will be taking the start line for the fourth time this November- one from Casino del Sol employees and another, "Team Yaqui" for community members.

For many El Tour regulars, their distinctive jerseys and roadside support have become an important part of the El Tour experience. For the tribal members, this has been about much more than cycling though, El Tour now plays an important role in the health and wellness of the community through its emphasis on preventing and helping individuals manage diabetes, while promoting a healthy active lifestyle.

This is reflected in the team's slogan: "Fighting Diabetes, One Mile At A Time". The experience for many riders has become a source of "Yaqui Pride", as well as an opportunity for family bonding, not to mention the use of affordable and sustainable transport. Also, it goes without saying riding El Tour is fun, as well as a challenge that the Yaqui participants look forward to as much as everyone else!

The program began in 2010, with Yaqui riders taking part in their first El Tour under the auspices of the Diabetes Prevention Program in 2013. That year, 30 riders completed the most challenging El Tour on record when rain rendered the course slippery and cold. Since then, the program has grown with more than 100 Yaqui riders from both teams completing the 2016 El Tour in various distances.

For many tribal communities across the United States, diabetes is a major public health concern. Arizona tribes have some of the highest prevalence rates of Type 2 diabetes in the world. Staying active, eating healthy foods and maintaining a healthy weight are key

factors in beating this. Exercise, in combination with a healthy diet and appropriate medication, has been shown to improve health outcomes for people at risk for or living with Type 2 diabetes.

The Pascua Yaqui Tribe has an active and successful diabetes prevention and treatment program funded through the Special Diabetes Program for Indians that is currently awaiting reauthorization by Congress. PYT has embraced cycling in El Tour as part of this community-wide effort to reduce the rate of diabetes affecting their people. Tribal members from the Yaqui communities of Guadalupe, Marana, Old Pascua, New Pascua and Barrio Libre all come together to train and participate.

Programs which use a goal event (like El Tour) give participants a place to celebrate their better health and a deadline for their training. For the riders, health gains and hard work both begin months before they arrive at the start line of El Tour. Hard working community organizers and Wellness Center staff at New Pascua work to set up bike repair workshops, group training rides and talks on nutrition, bike maintenance and training. Those wishing to enter "Team Yaqui" and Casino del Sol El Tour groups

Pascua Yaqui pose proudly as a team. Photo courtesy Pascua Yaqui Bike



away as Australia. Donors enjoy seeing their used bikes, or overstock helmets, used to bring joy and health to the Yaqui community on the group's active Facebook page.

This year, many riders will also complete the indoor El Tour at the tribe's state of the art Wellness Center on the reservation at New Pascua behind Casino del Sol. They will also ride in events from the fun ride to the century. From young children, youth to grandparents the tribe will be represented by several

generations, often riding alongside one another. At the finish line, they will all gather under the red, white and light blue of their tribal flag, enjoy healthy refreshments and revel in the sense of accomplishment of completing, another El Tour.

If you find yourself riding alongside one of the Team Yaqui riders in this year's El Tour, or any of the other Perimeter events, they're more than happy to talk about how riding bikes has made such a positive impact in their lives and on their community. From bike lanes on the reservation to kids riding with their grandparents, to stories of weight loss and better health, cycling has been a force for good in the community.

If you'd like to help out with the program, please say hello during the El Tour week or visit Team Yaqui's Facebook page www.facebook.com/pascuayaquibike. Or visit Pascua Yaqui Tribe Diabetes Prevention and Treatment Program on Facebook or call PYT Wellness center at 520 8796203 and ask for Mariano.

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