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Ride for melanoma planned in Galesville

Goal is to raise awareness of skin cancers - and have fun

By [WENDI WINTERS](#), For The Capital

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Several years ago, County Executive John R. Leopold discovered a small, flat dark spot on his abdomen had gained a texture.

Dennis Callahan, the county's chief administrative officer, kept feeling a tiny bump on his head when he combed his hair. He never saw the spot on his hip.

Three years ago, beauty contestant Brittany Lietz, while preparing for Miss Maryland USA, didn't notice the changes in a mole on her back as she admired her baked-on tan at the tanning salon.

They all were later diagnosed with cancerous melanomas, cancers of the skin.

Tests revealed cancerous cells had reached a sentinel node in Mr. Leopold's armpit. He had the lymph nodes removed from under his right arm and has survived six years since his cancer was detected.



Wendi Winters - For The Capital

Galesville resident Ken McGregor Shuart, 48, plans to bike across America with three friends. Dubbing themselves Ride4Melanoma, to raise funds for skin cancer awareness, they are participating in the Race Across America with 300 other cyclists.

It's been five years since Mr. Callahan's melanoma was removed. Shortly after his diagnosis, he discovered his father had died of melanoma. He now wears a hat when he's outside and, to avoid overexposure to the sun, he reluctantly stopped sailing and curtailed his golfing.

"My Hollywood days are over," he quipped.

Despite a telltale scar on her back from her surgery, Ms. Lietz won the Miss Maryland tiara in 2006. Skin cancer awareness became her platform.

All three have made melanoma awareness a personal campaign.

It's personal for 48-year-old Galesville resident Ken McGregor Shuart, too.

His 50-year-old sister, landscape de-signer Cindy Shuart of Epping Forest, was diagnosed with melanoma on her back. The Stage I cancer was caught in time: she's in remission. But, a week later, Mr. Shuart had surgery to remove yet another patch of basal cells - a common form of skin cancer - from behind his ear and off his collarbone. He's had several procedures: tiny scars mark his face and scalp.

"I realized both my parents, Cindy, my brother Steve and I have all had basal cells removed. Suddenly, skin cancer went from being a disfiguring nuisance to the real deal," he said. "Skin cancer is part of my family history and my future. I asked what can I do? I'm a computer programmer and an athlete."

According to National Cancer Institute statistics, one in 58 men and women will be diagnosed with melanoma of the skin during their lifetime. Anne Arundel County has a death rate due to melanoma of 17 people per year, or 3.6 melanoma deaths per 100,000 people, and higher than the national average of 2.6 deaths per 100,000 people. St. Mary's (5.1), Carroll County (4.6), and Allegany County (3.8), are the only Maryland counties with higher rates.

After consulting with his wife, Jody, and son Gavin, 15, Mr. Shuart, a systems analyst for Florida-based CPS Systems, formed a team to raise money for the Children's Melanoma Prevention Foundation, a program that educates school children to be "SunAware."

With three friends, he entered the 3,000-mile Race Across America. It's not for the faint of heart. Race Across America starts in early June in Oceanside, Calif., with 300

participants from around the world, and ends in mid-June at the finish line at Annapolis' City Dock.

"Other teams use the race as a platform for their charities; ours is to raise money for a nationwide program about skin cancer awareness," he said.

Begun in 1982, the Race Across America is now the longest tenured ultra-distance bicycle endurance competition in the world. The race has attracted nearly 70 two-, four- and eight-person teams and two dozen soloists.

The Team Ride4Melanoma hopes to raise \$100,000 in pledges and donations during their race to benefit the Children's Melanoma Prevention Foundation.

Joining Mr. Shuart is Washington, D.C., resident Jody Bennett, 44, director of sports marketing for Velocity Sports & Entertainment; Stuart Levy, 47, of Fairfax, a planning and budget specialist for the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight; and 41-year-old Steve Laurenson, also of Fairfax, a commercial real estate agent for Marcus & Millichap Real Estate Investment Services.

The four are avid adventure racing participants.

"We usually go 24- to 48-hours non-stop. We're given a map and compass and have to navigate to various points on a racecourse. It involves mountain biking, trail running, canoeing, white water swimming, ropes, rappelling, zip lines," Mr. Shuart explained. "We go all day and night with just the food and water on our backs. Once, we had to swim across a freezing lake at 3 a.m. to reach a checkpoint. If anyone had refused, we'd be disqualified."

Biking 3,000 miles in one-hour relays, then, should be a breeze. "Each team rider only has to go six hours each day, an hour at a time," he said confidently. "We get to rest."

"We have a 10-person road crew including a cook, drivers and navigators, two cars and a 35-foot RV," Mr. Shuart said. "We're getting donations and sponsorships to cover our costs. Capital Bicycle, Annapolis Dermatology Associates, the Dermatology Nurses Association and Coolibar, a protective apparel company, are all helping."

Though the race will be nationally televised, Team4Melanoma is designing a Web site, complete with maps, daily blogs by the riders and games. Mr. Shuart is hoping the Web site will attract children, who also will read his messages about preventing sun

damage to their skin at an early age.

On April 20, Mr. Shuart is organizing the Ride4Melanoma at the Carrie Weedon Science Center, at the end of Main Street in Galesville. The event is not a race. It is a day of cycling along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. Participants will enjoy rides of either 10, 20 or 50 miles through rolling horse and farm country while drinking in spectacular views of south county.

Riders can start anytime between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. and must return to the start-finish line by 3 p.m.

The registration fee is \$35 per person, a tax-deductible donation to the Children's Melanoma Prevention Foundation. Some riders also are downloading a pledge form from the Ride4Melanoma Web site and asking friends and family to sponsor their one-day ride.

There also will be a silent auction and raffle at the Carrie Weedon Science Center. If you are riding, please wear a bike helmet and plenty of sunscreen.

Mr. Shuart hopes to raise funds for the team's efforts and for the roundation, raise awareness about skin cancers and prevention techniques, and he said, "to have fun!"

To register for the Ride4Melanoma or for more information, visit the Web site www.ride4melanoma.com/Registration.com or contact Mr. Shuart at 202-256-6424.

"I'm amazed how many people have had a melanoma, the number is pretty staggering," said Mr. Callahan. "If it happened to us, it can happen to you."

Wendi Winters is a freelance writer living on the Broadneck Peninsula.

- No Jumps-

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