Team Navy Jax cyclists ride to combat MS

Front row, from left, Fleet Readiness Center Southeast (FRCSE) Deputy Production Officer Cmdr. Victor Feal, team captain of Team Navy Jax, FRCSE Commanding Officer Capt. Chuck Stuart, and Team Navy Jax founder Miriam Gallet gather with Team Navy Jax members at the start line for a group photo. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - Team Navy Jax cyclists, comprised of active and retired military and Department of Defense civilians, participated in the 30th annual Multiple Sclerosis (MS) PGA TOUR Cycle to the Shore event Oct. 22.

Team members raised more than $13,500 to benefit the MS National Society, a charity supported by the Combined Federal Campaign.

The team kicked off its first MS ride in 2005, with a humble 11 members. Fast forward to just over a decade, and the team has grown to around 35 members, with no signs of slowing down. The team is sponsored by VyStar Credit Union, which contributes by providing team members with their jerseys and shorts.

The cyclists were eager to gather together for the ride in the early morning hours, despite the bracing first cold of the year for the unpredictable North Florida autumn. They gathered at The Players Championship in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida where they had the option of riding either 40, 60, or 100-mile paths in an effort to raise funds and awareness to combat MS. Typically, their paths would end at Marineland in St. Augustine after biking to Daytona

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Beach on day one and riding back the next day to the finish line. However, damage caused by Hurricane Matthew forced the organization to change the routes on a scenic path back to the starting line.

Cmdr. Victor Feal of Fleet Readiness Center Southeast and captain of Team Navy Jax, was excited about the ride despite the changes made to the route.

“Our team had a great ride this year,” said Feal, who is transferring to Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md. and leaving the team. “We had four team members raise over $1,000 for this ride which put them at ‘Top Banana’ status. Since I took over as captain three years ago, the team has raised more than $80,000 for community events. I’m really going to miss these events and the camaraderie of this team.”

“This year, the coordinators had a best jersey competition and our team won for best design,” he added. “I am very proud to have been a part of this team and all we’ve accomplished.”

Another member of the team Chief Petty Officer Daniel Flynn of Patrol Squadron 26, had his own reasons for contributing to the fight against MS.

“My cousin was diagnosed with MS, so the whole family contributes towards the efforts of raising funds and awareness for this condition,” he said. “I do the bike rides down here, my family in New Hampshire participates in fund-raising walks, and we donate to each other’s events. Plus, I just like riding my bike. It’s great exercise.”

According to Lt. Kelly Brugler of Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing Eleven, it’s a fun and worthy cause.

“I did my first MS ride in Australia and it’s a great way to get out and meet people while raising money for a great cause,” she said.

National MS Society North Florida Chapter President Corrina Madrid was excited about Team Navy Jax’s participation in the ride, and spoke positively about the team’s longstanding dedication to the cause.

“We’re thrilled to have Team Navy Jax be part of the 30th Anniversary Bike MS to the Shore” she said. “The team’s spirit and camaraderie are so inspiring and we’re glad they’re here to help try to cure MS forever.”

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Lt. Kelly Brugler of Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing Eleven, attaches her official race number to the frame of her bicycle Oct. 22 prior to the beginning of the annual Bike MS: PGA TOUR Cycle to the Shore. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Commanding Officer Capt. Chuck Stuart, a member of Team Navy Jax, receives his official race number from Bike MS: PGA TOUR Cycle to the Shore volunteer Crystal Miner before the annual ride Oct. 22. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

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Team Navy Jax cyclists take off on either a 40, 60, or 100-mile ride for the benefit of research for the cure of Multiple Sclerosis. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

Cmdr. Victor Feal of Fleet Readiness Center Southeast and Team Navy Jax captain leaves the start line with co-worker and fellow team member Don Dunlap during the Bike MS: PGA TOUR Cycle to the Shore Oct. 22. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)

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Team Navy Jax members Capt. Chuck Stuart, commanding officer, Fleet Readiness Center Southeast, and Cmdr. Kris Sanchack of Naval Hospital Jacksonville, hit the road at the beginning of the Bike MS: PGA TOUR Cycle to the Shore. (U.S. Navy Photo/Released)