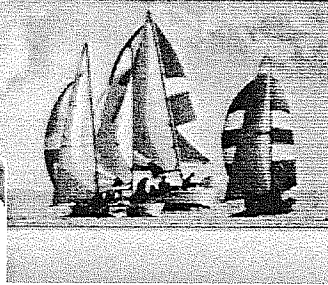


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THE LONG ISLAND Advance



Welcome to our online edition!

- SITE INDEX
- Homepage
- News
- Editorials
- ▶ Columns
- ▶ Letters To The Editor
- ▶ Email Us
- Local Sports
- Obituaries
- Real Estate
- Classifieds
- Public Notices
- Dining & Entertainment
- Calendar
- Local Links
- The LI Advance
- ▶ About Us
- ▶ Staff Roster
- ▶ Advertise With Us
- Special Sections
- The Islip Bulletin
- Suffolk County News

Photo By: Sarah Harmann—Jay D'Agostino (left) and William Iaia III will be taking their show on the road on July 21.

Men of iron, bikes of something lighter

Story By: SARAH HARTMANN, Staff Writer

05 July 2007

What would possess two married guys to outfit themselves like pros, hop on the kind of bikes most people will never need to own, and ride hundreds of miles across long stretches of open road, over daunting hills, and in unbearable heat?

For William Iaia III, a Patchogue Village resident, and Jay D'Agostino, who lives in Centereach, the answer might be twofold. First, it's a challenge and it's fun. But more importantly it is for a very good cause: providing a special home for medically fragile and technology-dependent children.

The proceeds from their second charity bike ride (Iaia and D'Agostino rode together last year for the same cause) will go to Angela's House, a special home for children with medical needs so specific that parents cannot take care of them at home. The first Angela's House opened in 2000 after a 10-year effort by Bob Policastro, whose daughter Angela was born with severe brain damage in 1989.

The Policastro's, like so many other parents with medically fragile and/or chronically ill children, found themselves largely on their own with a child too physically needy to be at home. Children like this do not need to be in a hospital, but rather need the surroundings of a loving home environment staffed with medical professionals and the medical equipment required to keep them alive and comfortable.

Policastro's small daughter Angela died, but her legacy has been his effort, aided by the Associations for Technology Dependent Children (ATDC) and Independent Group Home Living (IGHL), to build homes for children like her. Currently, there are two completed Angela's Houses, one located in East Moriches in conjunction with IGHL, the other in Smithtown. ATDC is working to develop a respite center for families who care for these children at home.

Last year, Iaia and D'Agostino took their first bike ride together for the cause, clocking in 900 miles from Chicago to Centereach and raising around \$8,000. "But we were inexperienced last year. We held a 50/50 raffle and gave the rest of the money to Angela's House. This year, we're doing the raffle again

but we're also tapping contractors for contributions," said D'Agostino. He added that Double R Contracting of West Babylon has already contributed \$7,000 and will be featured as the sole name on his and Iaia's riding uniforms.

This year, the ride for Angela's House will take the two bicyclists from Jacksonville, Florida to Centereach, a total of 1,000 miles that they have carefully estimated to take eight days. As happened last year, they will end up at McCarthy's Pub, where there will be a welcome home party awaiting them. D'Agostino noted that knowing so many people would be expecting them to show up at a certain time to celebrate was one reason he and his partner took a ride to Jacksonville to plot out their course.

The other reason had to do with basic survival. The previous trip taught D'Agostino a lesson that Iaia, having biked cross-country by himself twice, already knew. There can be lots and lots of roadway completely devoid of any services—no 7-Elevens, no Wawas, no houses, no one-pump gas stations, not even a picnic table.

"In Georgia there is a 90-mile stretch with nothing and another remote stretch in South Carolina just like it. We'll just have to push through those pieces," said Iaia. Eventually, they will stop at one of the hotels they have marked in their trial run, which is a big reason they are taking the old state highways. Hotels, motels and diners still dot these roadways, except, of course, for the places where Mother Nature runs the show.

They say they are figuring to ride eight hours per day; drink approximately five gallons of water and/or Gatorade; burn up thousands of calories each (last trip it was 6,000 cals per day); eat as many as five Whopper-fries-milkshake-and-soda meals per day (they need the fat); and then stop for dinner, if they're lucky.

They will pack light, very light, each carrying a tiny backpack to hold water, gym shorts, a T-shirt, a toothbrush, a pair of three-dollar flip flops, a patch tool kit, and two extra Kevlar tires that fold up small enough to fit inside of a paper cup. And naturally they have been training. It began at the gym every day, but now training is on the road.

Either way, training has meant a 20-mile ride per night, 40 to 60 miles on the weekends. Both men either ride before work or take their bikes to work, and ride when they can. "At this point, we need to clock in time in the saddle," said Iaia.

D'Agostino has less of that than does Iaia, an avid lifelong bike rider. The fact that his partner was a novice worried Iaia when they took their Chicago trip last year. Biking with traffic, like over the George Washington Bridge and through Manhattan, is dangerous. In fact, biking on highways is dangerous, period. "You can get killed so easily. There are trucks, tight roads, drivers in a hurry or with a few beers in them," said Iaia. And this kind of biking means traveling with traffic, not on the side of the road.

D'Agostino made it just fine but recalls training on Nicolls Road to prepare himself for the challenge. "And that was scary enough," he said.

With their ETA being July 28, the ride for Angela's House should begin July 21. D'Agostino, now a convert to the iron-man lure of the very long bike ride, said he figures it will become an annual event. Iaia, however, said he'd like to take what he calls a "full trip" as in from sea to shining sea. "It's amazing what you can do when you are out there and there is absolutely nothing else to do but ride," he said.

Bill Iaia and Jay D'Agostino will participate in a 5K run for Angela's House July 8 to start and finish at Jack McCarthy's Pub in Centereach. For those interested, there is a \$25 participation fee. For information go to www.jaydagostino.com.