

Section D

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Community

Fabulous Finds

New Eyes holiday sale set for Saturday.

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CHARITY

Resident participates in international bike ride

By Katie Panicali
of The Item

On Nov. 1, cyclist Kyung-Joo Ha found herself staring down the steepest hills she'd ever attempted riding. Miles away from her home in the township, surrounded by 600 cyclists from around the world, she faced five days of challenging terrain ahead. The destination? A children's hospital in Jerusalem.

The Wheels of Love International Charity Bike Ride in Israel benefits the ALYN Hospital, one of the world's leading specialists in the active and intensive rehabilitation of children who are afflicted with a broad range of physical disabilities. Ha heard about the charity ride from a patient at her dental practice who had participated in the event for the previous three years. Inspired by patients who spent their free time volunteering, Ha decided to find sponsors and put her love of bike-riding to good use.

"I wanted my passion for biking and hiking to be a healthy habit for my children for the rest of their lives, and at the same time get involved in a good cause to help others," said Ha. She rode her bike all over New York City before moving to the

township 11 years ago. Biking soon became a family activity.

"Our favorite weekend outing was biking and hiking in South Mountain Reservation," she said. "My love of the outdoors and biking became contagious, and now we as a family can go far distances and enjoy biking in many New Jersey trails and all over the east coast."

With all of her experience, Ha still found the Israeli landscape trying. She explained that if she'd faced those hills in her own travels, she would have turned back. But the community and the cause kept her going.

"That's why people do things together," she commented. "You keep each other motivated." She traveled on-road with 150 riders at 50 miles per day; the rest of the participants were off-road. Explaining that she's not a pro-cyclist, she says that if she can do it, anyone can.

"My son says it's all mental," she added, "and he's right!"

The ride began in Northern Israel and Ha described the landscape as being "made for bikers." Though she was worried before she arrived, she felt safe during her stay.

"I am very fortunate to have had this opportunity to see and experi-

ence a very positive side of Israel, also very beautiful and spiritual, rather than what we've been seeing in the media," said Ha.

On the first day of Wheels of Love, the bikers were hit with an Israeli anomaly: rain and hail. Ha explained that in that region, it only rains four days a year.

"I picked the right day!" she laughed. Due to the weather, the second day of the trip was cancelled, and the bikers had the opportunity to visit a winery.

Ha said that although Israel is about the same size as New Jersey, northern, middle and southern Israel each have very different climates and landscapes. Ha mapped out the journey she took: from Rosh Pinna to the Sea of Galilee, to the Jordan River; a climb up to the Golan Heights to a trek across the Hula Valley; and a climb from Mt. Hermon to Neve Ativ. The group passed from the border of Jordan to Syria, descended toward Lake Kinneret to Beit She'an and commenced another climb up to Mt. Gilboa. On the last day, they rode from Modi'in up to Jerusalem.

"Every day we climbed 2,500 to 5,000 feet in Northern Israel - you can imagine how beautiful the mountains are in Israel!" she said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KYUNG-JOO HA

Township resident Kyung-Joo Ha poses with a mountainous Israeli backdrop during the Wheels of Love International Charity Bike Ride to benefit the ALYN Hospital for children in Jerusalem. The annual ride took place Nov. 1 to 5 this year.

At the culmination of their trip, the cyclists came face to face with the purpose of their efforts: the children of ALYN Hospital. Kids and parents waited at the hospital on a hill in Jerusalem, ready to greet and

thank their benefactors. Ha described being touched by the gratitude of so many people she'd never met before, welcoming her and the other riders with open arms.

"Mostly, I am learning that col-

lectively people can make a difference," said Ha, "so don't lose hope, and don't say no to a good cause if you can."

E-mail: panicali@northjersey.com