

MSD's Experiential Ed Program Completes 'Katy 100'

Helen Keller once said, 'Life is a daring adventure or nothing'. MSD's Experiential Education program takes that ideology and places it at the forefront of our program.

A recent adventure put forth this adage and the students rose to the challenge. Dubbed 'The Katy 100' nine middle school students and four staff proposed to ride bikes along the Katy Trail 100 miles from Jefferson City to St. Charles, departing Friday evening and ending Sunday night.

The Katy Trail is a state park managed by Missouri Department of Conservation. Running along a former train route, the first section was opened in 1990. Now, the entire trail consists of 240 miles of recreational trail from Clinton (south-east of KC) in the west to Machens (just north of St. Charles) in the east. Technical descriptions do no justice to this inspiring trail. The trail gently lays at the base of tall bluffs along the Missouri River Bottom. To the south the wide valley opens to patchworks of rich fields and wooded fence rows. At times the river slowly drifts along the edge of the trail, it's wide expanse wandering along as if keeping cyclists company. In the Fall the valley is nationally recognized for its vibrant colors along the bluff tops. Deer, raccoons, opossums, stout red-tail hawks and even bald eagles are frequent sights along this diverse rural track. Small towns still dot the route. Remnants of the once booming train service and centers of exchange, now sit as reminders of a simpler time. History too has left its mark. Numerous points of interest follow and illustrate the Lewis and Clark Expedition (aka Corps of Discovery Expedition, 1804-1806) and the later life of Daniel Boone.

This adventure began with planning, discussing and gearing-up for the trek. Students attended a class at Walt's Bike Shop in Columbia where they learned to change flat tires and other basic repairs. Fridays departure began after dark. Using headlamps and front and rear lights on the bikes the crew made its way to 12 miles from North Jefferson City to the small town of Tebbetts. There, they met the support vehicle and settled into the Turner Katy Trail Shelter. Originally the building was a church, then general store, then sat unmaintained for many years. Only recently has the Conservation Federation of Missouri renovated the facility into a hostel style inn for those using the Katy Trail. With sore muscles and hungry stomachs, the group settled in and cooked dinner and spend the night.

Saturday a thick fog hung in the valley and heavy frost crusted the bikes. After a hearty breakfast and discussion, the students braced themselves for a long day of riding. Their goal for that day; travel the 53 miles from Tebbetts to Marthasville, where Philly's Pizza awaited them...as long as they arrived before 10 PM. With the thought of hot pizza spurring them on, they rode solidly through the day. As the sun climbed into the sky temperatures rose to a delightful 70 degrees. As bodies adjusted to the long ride, everyone settled in and began enjoying the serenity of the river valley with it's fine display of fall color. With the sun easing below the horizon the river followed right along the trail and was painted a brilliant orange from the sunset. Continuing on temperatures fell, but did nothing to hamper their spirits. All were committed to making it to Marthasville and a calm determination settled in upon the group. And in the chill, first one then another noticed the moon. It had risen low to the south and it's chasing reflection upon the river brought a sense of awe and a new energy. Digging deep and pushing themselves onward Marthasville finally appeared. Philly's was a warm and inviting reprieve from the cold that came with the night. Pizzas were ordered and consumed and the group shook the chill from their bones. Warm and full, half fell asleep at the table before they departed to make camp. In a grand gesture of kindness, three staff left the warmth of the pizza parlor and erected the tents at the Marthasville Community Club Park. It is often said that a meal taste better and a body sleeps better when it has been earned. This day, the group had found strength and determination few, if any, had ever tapped. This day they earned both and more.

Sunday the weary travelers awoke to tents crusted in frost. But the sun was bright, their legs rested and the end was in sight. A scant 38 miles ahead lay St Charles; The beginning of Lewis and Clark's expedition and the end of their adventure. Ahead they sped with renewed enthusiasm, but as the day drew out, the affects of their hard work began to take a toll. As night fell the lights of St Louis illuminated the sky ahead. Rolling under the 40/61 Highway bridge signaled they were near. Ticking of the final miles hastened as the trail cut through suburban subdivisions and finally into Missouri's first capital, St. Charles. Jubilant with their toil behind them and ecstatic to see the bus awaiting them, they sprinted onward to the larger than life statues of Lewis and Clark for a final and well earned finish photo.

Bonds form when a group shares an experience as this. Leaders emerge. Memories are forged. People are changed. Challenges such as these draw forth strength, both mental and physical, that most are seldom forced to call upon. In doing so limits once thought impassable are crumbled and tossed away. The depth of true potential appears and what was once 'I can't' becomes 'I can!'

by Ron Danuser

