

Here at ReThink Health UCRV we believe that when people come together from across a community, great things can happen. The latest proof of this came a couple weekends ago, when 5,000 people participated in the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Prouty, a community-wide walk/bike/row/golf event and charity fundraiser for the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Norris Cotton Cancer Center (NCCC).\* We're proud that three members of the ReThink team – Elliott Fisher (Chair of the Steering Committee), Laleh Talebian (Manager of Measurement and Evaluation), and Steve Voigt (Executive Director) – took part this year. In this blog post, Laleh shares her experience.

I started riding and volunteering at the Prouty in my 2nd year of graduate school at Dartmouth Medical School, where I was working on finding a cure for cancer. Over the past 15 years, I have biked anywhere from 100 to 170 miles in one day, or – the Prouty Ultimate – 200 miles in 2 days. Every year I ride in honor or memory of my loved ones who were affected by cancer.

Here are three reasons why I love the Prouty, and why you should participate next year:

- 1. Challenge yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally.** I LOVE riding, but preparing for 200 miles is still a mental and emotional process I have to go through. This year, I decided to dedicate a ribbon and an equal number of miles to each person in my life who has either died of cancer or is a survivor; that would certainly get me emotionally and mentally prepared and, with that, I knew the physical part would follow. Going through the process of counting – 38 people, 5.3 miles each – made me both very sad (for those who I have lost to cancer) and happy (for the majority who are now healthy and cancer-free). There were times when I felt spent and my only motivation to power through was going through that list, calling out each name, visualizing each face, and trying to imagine what they went through. Although I could never quite feel how they felt, it allowed me to shift my focus towards positive energy.
- 2. Engage with your local community** – While the aim of the Prouty is to raise money, the event wouldn't be what it is today without the many in-kind donations from the community. Local businesses supply tons of food, water, and entertainment. Bike shops volunteer their services to participants along the route who run into mechanical trouble. And trained medical personnel ride along with us, ready to help in case of injury or medical emergency. Community engagement is also evident at the various Stop and Go (or "SAG") stops located along the route in small towns in VT and NH. There, everyone from the retired elderly to young kids hand out food, water, and – my favorite on a hot day – ice cold towels. One of my favorite moments every year comes at mile 99 – almost to the finish line! – when I reach the very top of the last hill where Kendal, a senior

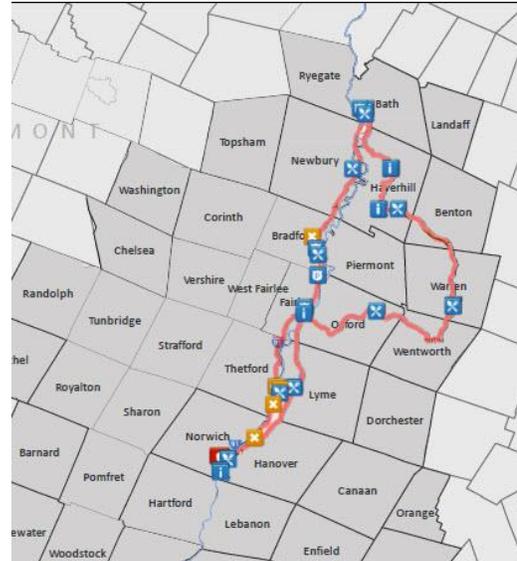


Figure 1 – The Prouty 100-mile cycling route goes through many towns in the ReThink Health UCRV service area

assisted living community in Hanover, is located. Residents of Kendal sit outside on the lawn, cheering and ringing bells, and the big sign they hold – “You are over the hill and so are we” – always brings a smile to my face and gives me the energy I need to complete that last mile.

3. **Be part of something bigger than yourself** – The Prouty shows how, in a small community, people come together to make an impact. Whether you’re walking or riding, rowing or golfing, cheering or chopping bananas, 8 or 80 years old – every single person’s involvement counts and adds up to something greater than the sum of its parts. This year’s Prouty was a huge success, raising over



Figure 2 - Laleh at one of the SAG stops

\$3.1 million to support cancer research and patient services at NCCC. It’s amazing and inspiring to think that the research conducted right here in our backyard informs cancer patients’ treatment around the world.

I feel very lucky to have turned an activity I absolutely LOVE – biking – into fundraising for a great cause. But more than that, I feel fortunate to be a member of this wonderful community and to be surrounded by kind and selfless people who give so generously from the bottom of their hearts. I want to thank all of you who participated, supported a participant, or volunteered for the Prouty. We have come far in the fight against cancer since 1982, but we still have a long way to go. I have to believe that one day we can say that our community, our nation, and our world is cancer-free. I hope I’m still riding when that day comes.

\*Note: NCCC is one of 41 comprehensive cancer centers designated by the National Cancer Institute for excellence in cancer research, care, and community outreach.

The Prouty began in 1982 when Audrey Prouty lost her nine-year battle with ovarian cancer, and four of her nurses – inspired by her courage – cycled 100 miles through the White Mountains of New Hampshire to raise money and awareness for cancer research. Since then, the Prouty has become a major wellness event and source of pride and inspiration for the UCRV region.