



## ■ Practices Take their Missions Outside the Exam Rooms

By: Jane Ehrhardt

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In April, 140 bicyclists peeled away from The Birmingham Bicycle Shop to cover 100 miles in one morning. That was the beginning of the fourth annual Tour de Blue event that ended with \$35,000 raised for prostate cancer.

"One year, some of the riders were survivors just a few months out of treatment," says Thomas Moody, MD, president of Urology Health Foundation that created the event. Started in 2003, the Foundation is the charity arm of the Urology Centers of Alabama.

The Foundation's fundraising primarily supports free prostate screenings across the state. Last year, they screened over 1,000 men.

"Alabama's overall death rate from prostate cancer is third highest in the nation, and we think directly related to not having early cancer detection," Moody says.

"If we identify cancer in a man, we take care of him no matter his ability to pay, including free surgeries and other types of treatment," Moody says. "We've been so successful in our practice we feel we have an obligation to help those who don't have the opportunity or money or transportation to get to Birmingham."

Nephrology Associates physicians and staff participate in the annual Alabama Kidney Foundation's Walk-a-Thon as a way to help those they regularly see battling kidney disease and enduring the hardships of dialysis. "We get so attached to our patients, it's just something we can do," says Terry Black, the practice administrator.

With kidney disease, Black says, "the caregivers have to put their financial life on hold a lot of times. It requires a lot to care for these patients." So the Kidney Foundation steps in to help pay basic bills and other costs.

"There are patients in my dialysis unit who, without the Alabama Kidney Foundation paying for their transportation and utility bills, would not be alive today," says Thomas Watson, MD, of Nephrology Associates.

Their entire staff attends the Walk to volunteer and enter the event. This year, the Walk had the misfortune of being scheduled shortly after Birmingham's devastating tornadoes. "Attendance was way down because people involved had lost homes or were helping others who had," Black says.

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Last year, the three Walks throughout the state raised over \$198,000. "It is a critical time for the Foundation this year, because we have been hit hard by the State budget cuts too," Watson says.

Urology Health Foundation is also diving into charity runs this year. On September 24, they will hold their first 5K race/1 mile fun walk. Dubbed the Great Prostate Cancer Challenge, it will be sponsored alongside ZERO, who created the event a few years ago in Baltimore.

The Alabama Allergy & Asthma Center took their awareness outreach to the sports field. Three years ago, they approached the Barons minor league baseball team in Birmingham about holding a Peanut Free Night. The Barons jumped on the idea.

"We found that a lot of children and adults were avoiding these kinds of events because of fear of encountering nuts," says Maxcie Sikora, MD, with The Alabama Allergy & Asthma Center.

The practice set up a booth at the event. "It was nice to see all these children from our practice there, and give back to our patients who have given so much to us," Sikora says. Over 2,000 people attended the game. "The Barons even allowed one of our children to throw out the first pitch."

Their biggest surprise came from "the sheer number of people that came up to us and were thanking us for doing this event where they could attend without being afraid; adults and children alike," Sikora says. "As a young physician, it's nice to see altruism in medicine still."

For Urology Centers of Alabama, high school coaches are their outreach target. "In small towns, the people they look up to are the football coach and the minister," Moody says. So to spread their message about the importance of prostate cancer screening, they attend the Alabama High School Athletic Association's annual meeting. "They have health insurance, but the issue is they don't get checked."

This is the practice's fourth year for the program. Last year, 1,500 coaches attended the meeting in Huntsville. They screened several hundred men at the meeting, "and have found some cancers," Moody says.

This year they're also taking the free screening program to a meeting of Methodist ministers in Montgomery. "One minister was our patient and has become an advocate for early detection, so we're attending their conference," Moody says.

"Anytime we've done anything like this, we've been blessed and rewarded far more than we've given," Moody says. He adds, "although cancer is our big thrust, we try to be active in other parts of the community's needs as well."

Last Christmas, their foundation donated four computers to a battered and abused children's program through the YMCA. "It's something we needed to do," Moody says. "As physicians, we all make a good living. We work hard. And part of our job ought to be to give back to the community."

Photo Caption:

Scott Tully, MD, of Urology Centers, waves as he rides in the Tour de Blue charity bike ride.

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