

## For rookie cyclist, serving others is part of life

City to Shore's top rookie cyclist raised \$11,000 for the 2009 ride – and she says she's just getting started.

Karen Clark, of Oakton, Va., has set her 2010 fundraising goal at \$20,000.

"I know it's pretty lofty, but it pushes me," she said.



Clark raised \$11,000 last year in just two months, so she's excited to see what she can do when she has the whole summer to raise money.

"When I fundraise, I never just do the minimum," she said. "I do half fundraising and half training and put 100% into it."

Clark, who has no direct connection to MS, learned her community-minded philosophy from her parents, her grandmother and the congregation of the Church of the Brethren in her hometown of Mt. Morris, Ill.

"When you're brought up Brethren, you knew you needed to live your faith," she said. "Volunteering or giving back was a way of life. You just step up to the plate when you need to help out."

And in the process of fundraising for City to Shore last year, she met many people who told her about their loved ones living with MS.

Before the ride, she sat down and wrote notes about the extended group of people she was riding for. She carried that important document with her while she rode.

"I had all these stories in my head, so it made it extremely personal for me on the ride," Clark said.

She also had a champion in Tania Kincaid, whose story gave rise to Team Tania, the nation's largest friends and family team. Clark, who rode for Team Tania, was thrilled to meet Kincaid and see how she's riding and living with MS.

Clark's first City to Shore was overwhelmingly positive, she said. Riding for people living with MS also was a great way to celebrate her October 4 birthday.

"The whole experience was amazing," she said.

She took hundreds of photos to document the ride and share it with donors in her community

near Washington, D.C., as well as the friends and neighbors from Mt. Morris who had supported her.

“It’s personal then for them, and they continue to support me for the rides I do,” Clark said. Already, colleagues are starting to ask if she’ll be doing any bike rides this year.

Another of Clark’s successful tactics was to hold her own fundraising auction. Last year, she collected 12 items, including massages, spa visits, framed photographs, pottery and gift certificates, and raffled them off to her supporters.

“Everyone loves a chance to win one of the items, and it makes it a fun way to raise money,” she said.

Clark honed her techniques preparing for Washington, D.C.’s AIDS Rides from 1997-2000, a 350-mile, 3.5-day ride. She was always among the event’s top five fundraisers and raised more than \$50,000 over the four years.

She advises other Bike MS rookies to write a really good sponsorship letter and send it to everyone they know, including businesses. In addition to asking for cash sponsorship, she requests that businesses donate items to give away. Don’t be afraid to ask, she emphasizes, and be sure to follow up with a thank you letter that shares your ride experience.

“I’m passionate about causes like MS and I’m driven to raise money by asking everyone around me, in the hopes that one day we will find a cure,” she said.