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Food drive relies on pedal power

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A community of local cyclists have put a spin on charitable giving -- literally.

With Thanksgiving around the corner, more than 100 people Saturday took to their bikes, sped through downtown Miami and bought canned beans, mac and cheese and other dry goods at five supermarkets from Little Havana to Miami Beach.

They donated it all to homeless people for Thanksgiving meals.

Welcome to Cranksgiving 2010 -- Miami-style.

"We're supposed to buy \$10 worth of food, which in cans is kind of heavy," said Miryam Rodriguez, 23, of Miami Lakes. She came to ride with her friends, Annette Lujan, 21, of Miami and Jonathan Sasda, 21, of Miami.

The key to hauling their load: Annette's messenger bag that was firmly strapped across her shoulder.

Following a map with five checkpoints, riders in Miami had to haul all their food back with them to the finish line at Miami-Dade County Hall, said Gary Mendenhall, one of the event's organizers.

Afterward, the cyclists headed to Camillus House in downtown Miami, where they donated the food. Camillus provides meals for the homeless.

Cranksgiving started in New York City in 1999 as a way for cyclists and bike messengers there to get food for the city's homeless the week before Thanksgiving. Since then, the ride has spread to 25 cities nationwide as well as to Vancouver, British Columbia, according to the Cranksgiving NYC website.

The word "Cranksgiving" is a play on "Thanksgiving" and "cranking," or pedaling really hard.

Saturday's bike ride was the second time the event took place in Miami.

Many people said they heard about it through the group Miami Bike Scene, or from friends and family.

The ride wasn't meant to be a hard slog for everyone.

Sure there were racers, who were trying to buy and haul the food in an hour. The fastest rider would get a prize.

But so would the most "charitable" -- the ones who brought back the most food, Mendenhall said.

Andrew Heitner, of Miami, brought his 4-year-old son Mateo to ride with him. His bike had a child's seat attached to it.

At each store, father and son would lock up the bike, buy the mini boxes of cereal or cans of black beans

together and then head to the next grocery store to fetch the next set of items.

“Mateo been looking forward to this,” Heitner said.

Some riders were newbies to the urban scavenger hunt/bike ride. Take Patrick Labora, for example. The 11-year-old sometimes rode to school with his parents, but had not followed a pack of cyclists.

His task: to buy groceries with his mom, Miami-Dade County Judge Deborah White-Labora, while his brother, Chris, 18, and Chris's girlfriend, Jennifer Mendez, 17, watched their bikes.

He was game.

“My mom told me we should go help people because not everyone gets to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal,” Patrick said.

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