



California Coast Classic Adult Honoree

Dee Hammer

Day 3: Big Sur, CA



“In 2005 I was diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis, and just before last year’s CCC ride I added Lupus to my history. I have been involved with the California Coast Classic for the last 7 years as a rider or volunteer, it has become my second family.”

Dee is a true champion of yes! She says yes to riding hundreds of miles; as a nurse she says yes to caring for her patients, she says yes to giving hours each year as a volunteer, she says yes to being an advocate and yes to sharing her story to help others understand arthritis. She doesn’t focus on things she can’t do, she looks for opportunities to embrace yes. If you need of inspiration during the tour, just look for this rider in her signature Stitch helmet.

<http://www.californiacoastclassic.org/>

Visit Donation Page: Dee Hammer





California Coast Classic Adult Honoree

Mary Gonser

Day 4: Cambria, CA



"My name is Mary Gonser, a veteran volunteer of the Arthritis Foundation's California Coast Classic. When I was introduced to the CCC family 8 years ago, it was life changing. I have always been the type of person who finds pleasure in helping others and the CCC was the perfect opportunity for me to do this. The years of being a volunteer has given me a chance to practice my skills in sandwich making, fruit slicing, picture taking, but more importantly, cow bell ringing!

I volunteer because I want to show my appreciation for all that the CCC riders do each year to bring awareness to this disabling disease and one day, finding a cure!

I thank you too because I also have Arthritis."

Mary is an incredibly dedicated volunteer and is a total star! She always has a warm smile and kind word ready to share. She can be seen quietly and capably finding what needs to be done and taking care of endless tasks throughout the tour. We affectionately call her the First Lady of the CCC.

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Visit Donation Page: Darren Gonser





California Coast Classic Young Adult Honoree

Rachel Mershon, 18 years old

Day 5: Oceano, CA

At the age of three, **Rachel** was found to have a dysfunctional immune system. Her tiny body failed to mount a response to infection. Hematology and Infectious Disease specialists were able to document the phenomenon but were unable to pinpoint a cause. Thus, Rachel was followed for several years by a physician whose specialty was Immunology.

Just before ninth grade, her fingers appeared to be curving into a funny "s" shape and looked different than those of anyone else she knew. A referral to Orthopedics was made to investigate any abnormality in the bone structure of her hands, yet x-rays failed to unveil any evidence of a defect. When she began having pain in her feet, knees, and hips that sometimes made walking difficult, Rachel was promptly referred to Rheumatology, and the real culprit was discovered. Dr. Sanjay Chabra took one look at her disfigured fingers and was able to determine what extensive blood work confirmed. **At the age of fourteen, Rachel was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis.** She was immediately fitted for bulky braces to prevent further damage to her deformed fingers. She also began aggressive treatment in the form of Humira injections, oral Methotrexate, and Prednisone to halt the progression of this insidious disease.



Since 2012, Rachel has spent more than 2,000 hours working in her community, staying focused on something other than herself. She's joined the Walk to Cure Arthritis. Twice, she met with legislators as an advocate for the Arthritis Foundation, most recently at the California State Capitol during the first week of April 2016, in an effort to spread awareness of the challenges faced by those with chronic conditions. In

2014, she received an Arthritis Foundation travel award to participate in the National Advocacy Conference in Washington D.C. There, she visited the offices of her local Congressman and California Senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, to discuss the Foundation's legislative priorities including programs to increase access to qualified specialists and affordable therapy. The training that the Foundation provided was invaluable and helped her find her voice to tell her story with confidence.

On March 12, 2014, Rachel was elected the first student PTSA President in the history of Corona High School, which was established in 1896. For the past two years she's managed the largest association on her high school campus. As a member of St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Community, she has been heavily involved in various avenues of leadership over the years. She sang with the Youth Band and currently serves as a Eucharistic Minister. Rachel recently graduated from Corona High School with a cumulative GPA of 4.34, and ranked in the top 2% of her class. She enjoys tennis and hopes to continue playing indefinitely as part of a healthy, active lifestyle. As a 2016 Arthritis Foundation Winterhoff Scholarship recipient, she feels blessed to have been recognized for her efforts and is eager to continue dedicating her time as a volunteer for the Arthritis Foundation. She is attending Cal Poly San Luis Obispo while pursuing a degree in Nutrition in a quest to help others manage or prevent chronic illness. Rachel wants to give people hope after a serious diagnosis, enabling her patients to take control of their condition and live longer, healthier lives.

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Visit Donation Page: Rachel Mershon



California Coast Classic Adult Honoree

Jane LeGore

Day 7: Ventura, CA

After many years of "leaping" in sports (volleyball, track, cheerleading & dance), I took up running in my mid-40's when I eventually developed hip pain that quickly progressed beyond what my stubbornness could deny. In 2011 I was diagnosed with osteoarthritis and underwent a total hip replacement on my left hip in July 2012. Afterward my doctor advised me to seek non-impact activities and I became depressed at the thought of not being able to run anymore. Fortunately in early 2013 I discovered the ElliptiGO, an outdoor elliptical bicycle that emulates running without impact, and I've been riding it ever since!



In 2014 when I signed up for the CA Coast Classic, it was a bucket list item; to see if I had what it took to ride 525 miles on my ElliptiGO. The challenge seemed overwhelming and daunting. The unexpected part of my experience was meeting the veterans of the ride and the parents of children with arthritis and hearing their stories. I learned more about arthritis during the ride than I knew from my own diagnosis and hip replacement surgery. During that short week my perspective changed in a way that words cannot describe. I realized I was privileged to be able to choose my challenge for the week, when the children with this disease will live a life filled with daily challenges and pain.

Participating in the CCC is an opportunity to enjoy the majestic beauty of the coast, but the camaraderie of other like-hearted people and most importantly, having a positive impact on others in need & being part of something much bigger than yourself, is an amazing way to renew your spirit.

When I was 7 years old, I found a postcard of the Bixby Bridge. I didn't really know where the bridge was and I had never been to the California Coast before, but I had a fascination with bridges so I kept the postcard until I went away to college. Many years later when I started to travel, I promised myself I would "someday" drive over that bridge. That day never came, but imagine my exhilaration in 2014 when I got to cross the bridge riding my ElliptiGO during my first CCC! Although I have many favorite spots along the CCC tour route, crossing the Bixby Bridge is my absolute favorite!

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Visit Donation Page: Jane LeGore

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