Jersey Boys

Positive Pedalers cycle toward a 20-year milestone.

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Back in 1995, while cycling in the second California AIDS Ride—a weeklong fundraising tour from San Francisco to Los Angeles—the late Jonathan Pon realized the need to recognize participants who were living with HIV. By the next year's ride, Positive Pedalers was launched.

Twenty years later, the group is still pedaling, and it now boasts 13 chapters across the United States, with three in the San Francisco Bay Area alone. At first, all members of Positive Pedalers were living with the virus. That's no longer a requirement today, though of the group's nearly 1,400 participants, all but about 200 are HIV positive.

Members take part in any number of bike rides across the country and sometimes the globe, most notably those that raise funds for HIV/AIDS causes, such as the AIDS LifeCycle (which basically replaced the California AIDS Ride), the Braking AIDS Ride in New York and the SMART Ride in Miami. In addition, Positive Pedalers produces two rides each year: the Jonathan Pon Memorial ride and the Paul Hulse Century ride.

Individual chapters of the group also organize training rides and fun rides, plus non-cycling events. And members often step up as guest speakers at local community events to raise awareness and break down stigma.

In fact, the group's stated mission is to "eliminate stigma through our positive public example." But this can be tough to accomplish during one of the tours. The AIDS/LifeCyle, for example, draws over 3,000 people, of whom maybe 300 are Positive Pedalers. How to stand out?

"Our jerseys are an important part of our identity," says Greg Mahusay, a Positive Pedalers board member. "Some members also attach a bright orange PosPeds flag on their bike. It's always great to see a member cycling with the flags and our jersey. It's a reminder that HIV is still here and that people living with HIV are raising funds, raising awareness and eliminating the stigma of HIV."

Each year, Positive Pedalers holds a contest to design its T-shirts and cycling jerseys. For 2015, which marks the group's 20th anniversary, Carlos Urrutia designed what board member Greg Mahusay calls an "explosion of sentiments." The words represent the many feelings that "Carlos experienced as he turned

to Positive Pedalers for guidance during a time that required compassion, patience and support in his own life.”

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