

# Cyclists complete windy trek in memory of missing children

By LETRELL D. CRITTENDEN  
Observer-Dispatch

**NEW HARTFORD**—The cyclists may have been late, but their effort was well-appreciated.

After battling 25-mile-per-hour winds throughout their 105-mile trek, the nearly 230 participants of the Ride for Missing Children 2003 rode into the parking lot of the New Hartford Recreation Center just before 8 p.m. — about an hour after their anticipated arrival time.

But for the dozens of fans who cheered them on as they turned off Genesee Street, the cyclists' tardiness was secondary — their effort in raising awareness about missing children was all that mattered.

"The cause is more important than the time or weather," spectator Francis Constantine said.

This year's ride began in Madison County at the Troop D Headquarters of the New York State Police.

About 30 miles into the ride, cyclists made an emotional stop at the Sauquoit Valley school Sara Anne Wood attended 10 years ago. Her disappearance spurred local advocacy for missing children.

Cyclists would make four other stops at schools throughout the Mohawk Valley. At each site, event education committee chairwoman Denise Flihan said, the cyclists were well-received by the students.

"The kids were excited and the events were moving," Flihan said. "It was wonderful."

Emotions weren't the only challenges cyclists



By MICHAEL DOHERTY, Observer-Dispatch

The Ride for Missing Children 2003 passes the Marcy barracks of the New York State Police Friday where riders were saluted by about two dozen area law enforcement officers.

*"The cause is more important than the time or the weather."*

**Francis Constantine**

— spectator

faced. Gusty conditions kept their speeds at lower levels all day.

"It was in our faces three-fourths of the day," cyclist and organizing committee member Steve Dziegiel said.

Despite the challenges, Dziegiel said the cyclists stayed unified throughout the day. No one was

injured, he said.

"Today went blemish-free. It was an incredible day," Dziegiel said. It may also have been an incredible day for fund-raising. While final amounts have not been tallied, Dziegiel said each cyclist was asked to raise about \$500, and he raised \$2,500 himself.

It costs about a quarter to produce a missing child poster, Dziegiel said.

At the recreation center, families greeted their tired loved ones.

Natalie Bokert, a teacher at New York Mills high school, was proud of the effort of her brother, John Femia, a retired Utica Police officer.

"He is the most self-giving brother ever," Bokert said.

If everything goes well, Femia, who completed his fourth ride, said his sister will have more to be proud of next year.

"I'm eager for the fifth year," Femia said.