

FUNDRAISER

Peddalling for hope

A Cochrane breast cancer survivor joins a charity ride to Texas to raise money for other cancer survivors

TRENT EDWARDS
CALGARY HERALD

Vanessa Fischbuch pedals fast down Highway 22 near Bragg Creek, her face red from the blustery breeze and exertion.

She's the only cyclist on the road this cold, wet Friday morning. Clad in insulated pants, a long-sleeve fleece shirt, windproof jacket, cycling jersey and vest, the Cochrane stay-at-home mom is in the middle of yet another training ride.

Fischbuch, 43, has a cold, but she wants to train while her young children are in school. Cycling hard most days of the week has become habit over the past four months.

It had to be, if Fischbuch is to do her part on the Calgary To Austin Peloton Project's second annual 3,800-kilometre relay ride to Austin, Texas, to raise money and awareness for cancer survivors (www.ctapp.org).

As a breast cancer survivor, she's driven to provide a strong example to cancer patients looking for hope.

"I don't want to let anyone down," she says.

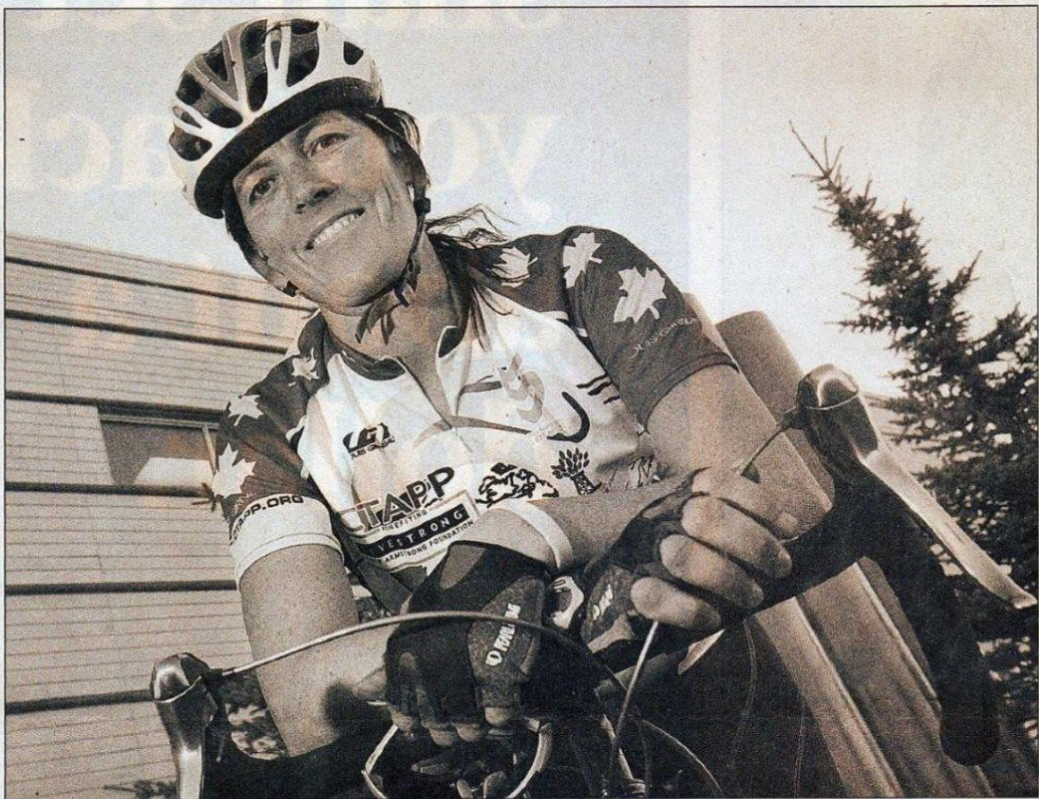
Today, Fischbuch joins 29 cyclists from Calgary and Edmonton on the epic charity ride, which began Sept. 27 and is scheduled to end in Austin on Oct. 5. She and her team of six are expected to ride about 125 kilometres a day over six hours before hopping into a support van to be ferried to a hotel for 24 hours of rest.

She's doing the ride for many reasons, including a love of cycling and adventure. But most of all, she wants to show how she has taken control of the body that betrayed her at a time when she expected to live a long and healthy life.

Seven years ago, Fischbuch was fit, young and pregnant with her third child in her native New Zealand. Then she felt a pea-shaped lump in her right breast. Six months later, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I thought it was a death sentence," she says during a pit stop on her Friday ride at Bragg Creek's Cinnamon Spoon.

Within days of her diagnosis on Dec. 3, 1999, the vibrant young woman had a mastectomy. Rounds of chemotherapy and radiotherapy followed over the next six months, luckily with no damage to her baby boy, Taine. Fearing the worst for herself, she made plans to



Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald

Vanessa Fischbuch is embarking on a marathon bike ride from Calgary to Austin, Texas, to raise money for Wellspring Calgary, a non-profit cancer survivor support group.

move to the Calgary area as soon as she finished her treatments. She knew her Canadian husband Eric would return the boys to the Calgary area should she die, and she wanted to lessen the upheaval they would feel in such a terrible situation.

During her convalescence, Fischbuch read everything she could about cancer. She drew inspiration from people who thrived after cancer treatments — people such as Lance Armstrong, who had just that summer won his first of a record seven Tour de France races after beating testicular cancer.

Now, Fischbuch wants to inspire other women newly diagnosed with cancer.

"It's just a matter of coming through the other side and moving on," she says.

Fischbuch has been riding a few hours a day three or four times a week since June to prepare for the CTAPP ride to Austin. Every Sunday, she joined a group ride of at least 100 kilometres. Her final taper-down ride in her training cycle was a 160-kilometre ride from Red Deer to Canada Olympic Park on Sept. 24.

Since getting cancer, Fischbuch has finished three sprint-distance triathlons (a 750-metre swim, a 20-kilometre ride and a five-kilometre run) and two duathlons (a 10-kilo-

metre run, 40-kilometre ride and five-kilometre run).

She runs about eight kilometres three times a week with her chocolate Lab, Kip.

And since moving to Cochrane five years ago, she has joined the Sistership every summer to race dragon boats with a team of breast cancer survivors.

Still, Fischbuch knows she can't stop cancer from invading her body again just by staying fit and eating well.

"But I can change what I do in between that time," she says. "I won't waste a minute."

That's why the beneficiary of this year's CTAPP ride is a group that's especially close to Fischbuch's heart.

Wellspring Calgary (www.wellspringcalgary.com) is a non-profit group that plans to begin offering cancer survivors and their families information and coping programs in early 2007.

Fischbuch and her husband have raised \$3,000 so far through donations and a movie-night benefit in August toward CTAPP's goal of raising \$500,000 for Wellspring Calgary.

As a CTAPP rider this year, Fischbuch is also a "guardian angel" for a cancer patient. The group is flying to Austin a cancer patient for each rider to ac-

company in the Lance Armstrong Foundation's annual Livestrong ride Oct. 8.

Fischbuch plans to ride the event's 64-kilometre route on a tandem bicycle with Joyce Lowe, a Sistership teammate from Calgary who is back in treatment for cancer.

Fischbuch had intended to bring another Sistership friend, but that woman became too sick to make the trip.

"It reminds me why I'm doing this," Fischbuch says. "I have friends who would do anything to go for a bike ride, but they're too sick."

Another reason she is joining the ride is to be an example to her boys of how to seek out the most rewarding aspects of life. Eric and their three sons — Joshua, 10, Eli, 8, and Taine, 6 — plan to fly to Austin to cheer Vanessa on and to participate in the Livestrong event's five-kilometre walk.

"Life's too precious," she says. "I won't waste a minute."

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