RSpy the mascot for Michigan State University's athletic programs, stands at the starting line of last year's MSU College of Human Medicine Gran Fondo in downtown Grand Rapids. (Submitted photo)

MSU COLLEGE OF HUMAN MEDICINE

MSU Gran Fondo rolls ahead with increased expectations

By Marc Dettman

The Michigan State University College of Human Medicine enters its third year in a full sprint toward an increase in rider participation for the MSU Gran Fondo on June 27.

The event serves as a fundraiser for the MSU medical school's skin cancer research program. Building on its first two successful years, the MSU Gran Fondo continues to gather momentum as West Michigan's biggest and best cycling event.

The event's allure to cyclists is embedded in its scenic routes, offered food stops and start-to-finish rider amenities. It also offers the perfect cycling experience for practically anyone who rides a bicycle from the professional and oriented performance athlete to recreational and family riders.

On the other side of the MSU Gran Fondo cycling coin, the side that works to support and sustain critical skin cancer research by the MSU College of Human Medicine, there has been a substantial increase of individual fundraising efforts, along with corporate and business sponsorships.

The MSU Gran Fondo has raised nearly $200,000 for skin cancer prevention, awareness, and research since 2015. Fundraising is trending well above last year's levels, and expectations are for a record-breaking year.

By highlighting the danger of the deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma, in a public event targeting outdoor-lifestyle enthusiasts and athletes, the MSU Gran Fondo has reinforced the need for skin cancer research in West Michigan.

In 2014, there were 76,100 reported cases of melanoma, with 7,730 deaths that year.

While event sponsors have offered support and growth for the event and the college's research program, the efforts of individual participants and teams have been the heart of MSU Gran Fondo fundraising.

Healthy competition between fundraisers has earned thousands of additional dollars for MSU College of Human Medicine’s research.

Personal motivations for fundraising include honoring the memory of friends and family who lost to skin cancer, contributing to the fight against the disease or simply giving something back to their MSU College of Human Medicine family.

The 2014 MSU Gran Fondo top fundraiser, Dr. David Benaderet, $12,520 for the MSU Gran Fondo. Benaderet, a cardiologist from Sterling Heights, graduated from the MSU College of Human Medicine in 1980. He is an avid cyclist and a veteran of other fundraising cycling events.

Dr. Benaderet's motivation for becoming an MSU Gran Fondo fundraiser came from a number of different directions.

"I had a friend who died of melanoma. I also started thinking about giving back to the MSU College of Human Medicine," Benaderet said.

"This year, I'm reaching out to my classmates to participate in the MSU Gran Fondo and to become matching fundraising," he said.

The event offers routes of 80, 40 and 25 miles on a 15-mile family ride and is garnering considerable praise and attention from across the country.

Earlier this year, the MSU Gran Fondo was selected by Gran Fondo Guide, as one of the "biggest and best" gran fondos in the United States.

The event ranks sixth in a group of eleven premium cycling events of their kind in nation. As one of the youngest events on the list, the MSU Gran Fondo earned national prominence by providing a quality cycling experience with selective routes. Registration for individuals, teams, fundraising and volunteers is available at msugranfondo.com.