



NEWS RELEASE

Downloadable photos/logo and more information:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Couple Living with Incurable Diseases Bike Across America

Coast-to-Coast Trek Raises Hope, Awareness and Research Funding for People with Chronic Digestive Disorders

Minneapolis, June 12 – After years of living with chronic digestive diseases that people only whisper about, Sam and Laura Kirstein are talking. In fact, this married couple is bringing more public visibility than ever to Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis by organizing and biking the **Tour de Guts** – a two-person bike ride across America to raise hope, awareness and funding for life-saving and life-enhancing research studies.

"More than a million Americans suffer from Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, but few want to talk about it," said Laura Kirstein, 36, who was diagnosed with Crohn's disease in 1990 after failed over-the-counter treatments for chronic digestive problems. "Though it's not exactly 'polite dinner conversation,' it's important we talk about inflammatory bowel disease and show people it's possible to live healthy, active lives with the right diagnosis and treatments."

"Biking across America is an intense physical challenge that takes guts, just like living with Crohn's disease and colitis. The **Tour de Guts** is our way of showing that – with perseverance, education and support – physical challenges can be tackled head-on," said Sam Kirstein, 38, who hasn't let ulcerative colitis stop him from leading an active and athletic life.

The Kirsteins will begin their 4,100-mile bike trek north of Seattle, Washington, on July 16 and will bike through 15 states. As they go, they will raise awareness for chronic digestive diseases through local events and an online blog that will tell stories of people they meet along the way who are also living with these disorders. The Kirsteins plan to wrap up the **Tour de Guts** on September 18 when they roll into Portland, Maine.

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). The diseases are often paired because many of the symptoms, debilitations and complications – which can be life-threatening – are similar.

IBD is a chronic digestive disorder of the intestines caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. It often strikes children and young adults in the prime of

(more)

their lives. An estimated 1.4 million Americans suffer from IBD, with approximately 30,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

Sam and Laura Kirstein are leading volunteers in the Minnesota/Dakotas chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA). Sam Kirstein, who grew up in Madison, South Dakota, and Laura (Strathman) Kirstein, born and raised in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, have been active participants in fundraising efforts for the CCFA, especially the sports-related events. In fact, they met at a CCFA bowl-a-thon in which Laura's team – "Bowling for Bowels" – took fourth place. Sam knew he had to meet the captain of the team. "Anyone who can face a chronic digestive disorder with such openness and humor, like me, is someone I need to know," he said. They married in 2004 and now live in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Kirsteins goal is to raise \$25,000 with the **Tour de Guts**, through corporate and private donations. All funds raised by the **Tour de Guts** will be directed to IBD research projects. For more information, visit www.TourdeGuts.org.

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(see page 3 for estimated tour schedule and cities)



Tour de Guts – Estimated Schedule and Cities

Tour dates and cities subject to change, due to weather, flat tires and other unforeseen circumstances.

July 2006

- Anacortes, WA: July 16
- Sandpoint, ID: July 23
- Whitefish, MT: July 26
- Havre, MT: August 1

August 2006

- Williston, ND: August 6
- Minot, ND: August 8
- Fargo, ND: August 13
- Little Falls, MN: August 16
- Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN: August 20
- La Crosse, WI: August 22
- Cedar Rapids, IA Area: August 26
- Osceola, IL: August 29

September 2006

- Fort Wayne, IN: September 1
- Bowling Green, OH: September 2
- Cleveland, OH: September 5
- Erie, PA: September 7
- Buffalo/ Niagara Falls, NY: September 9
- Rochester, NY: September 10
- Ticonderoga, NY: September 14
- Burlington, VT Area: September 15
- Conway, NH/ Lewiston, ME: September 17
- Portland, ME: September 18

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