

Grosse Pointe News

By Jody McVeigh on August 21, 2019



Patrick Arsenault on the trail.
Photo courtesy of Patrick Arsenault

In 1971, then-State Rep. Dick Allen decided he wanted to develop an event that promoted a bicycle-friendly environment in Michigan and demonstrate how bicycles and other vehicles can safely share state roads.

[The Dick Allen Lansing to Mackinaw bicycle tour](#), or DALMAC, started as a grassroots effort and has grown considerably through the years. This year's tour, which kicks off Aug. 28 and 29 at Michigan State University in East Lansing, is expected to draw more than 1,200 riders. Among them is Grosse Pointe Woods resident Patrick Arsenault, who is riding in his 23rd such tour.

"I started in 1994," the 64-year-old said. "The first one I did was with my father-in-law, who had been doing DALMAC for years. People who do DALMAC tend to come back and do it again and again and again. ... My father-in-law got me into biking and this was my chance to ride with him."

That first year almost didn't happen, Arsenault recalled, because his father-in-law was told he needed bypass surgery.

"But he got the doctor to postpone it so he could ride with me,"

Arsenault said. "He'd been doing DALMAC for years. And for a number of years, he was one of the oldest guys doing it. He rode well into his 70s."

That first ride was enough to hook Arsenault, who specifically trains each summer for DALMAC. He tries to get 1,000 miles in before the tour — 200 in June, 500 in July and 300 in August. The tour, open to any capable and interested bicyclist, ends Sept. 1 in Mackinaw City.

"DALMAC is always the last week in August, the weekend before Labor Day," he said. "Some years, we finish DALMAC and we'll do the Bridge Walk Monday morning."

"The route I'm going on is five days," he continued. "Every day, you're riding 60, 70 miles. It's a great way to see the state of Michigan. You go through towns you wouldn't normally go through."

A variety of routes is available, including the century ride — 100 miles a day for four days — that Arsenault used to take.

"I had to work on getting in shape for that," he said. "DALMAC is not an easy ride. ... I've been dialing it down the last couple years."

Throughout the ride, DALMAC trucks move personal belongings from point to point.

"You stay in high schools and use their facilities," Arsenault said. "You're on your own to get from the beginning to the end each day. You have to start the day with what you need."

What started for Arsenault as a great way to stay in shape turned into a great way to meet new people. Bikers, he said, are a friendly bunch.

“Riders come from all over Michigan to do this ride,” he said. “You can stay with one group of riders and talk for hours. It’s fun to see the state of Michigan that way, too, especially when you get out to Petoskey, Traverse City — it’s beautiful to see on a bike.”

While Arsenault has yet to recruit his children for the tour — “They say I ride too fast.” — he’s gotten a couple friends to join him. He also participates in the MS 150 charity ride to benefit multiple sclerosis research and education.

DALMAC is not a fundraiser; riders don’t have to collect pledges to participate. But there is a fee to ride, a portion of which is used to fund bicycling-related organizations and causes. Since 1975, proceeds from the tour have allowed The DALMAC Fund to grant more than \$1.3 million toward numerous bike trail and public safety projects, as well as extending bicycling opportunities to those with disabilities.

“Biking is great exercise, a great way to socialize,” Arsenault said, noting local bicycling groups like Slow Roll and Grosse Pointe Pedalers. “It’s important to get out with people you know and have some fun.

“Grosse Pointe is safe to bike in, but I think we could take a lesson from Detroit with all the bike lanes they’ve put in,” he continued. “That’s something Grosse Pointe could take a page from — a bike lane on Kercheval.”

Moving forward, Arsenault said he’d like to participate in DALMAC as many years as he can.

“I want to see how far I can go,” he said. “It’s a great motivator to stay in shape and stay on the bike.”