

## Cyclists Pedal Toward Five-Million-Dollar Goal in Rise Across Texas

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Cyclists will ride across Texas, from east to west, to raise money for Rise Schools. Photo: Courtesy Rise Across Texas

Texas is big. How big? You could drive from Texarkana in northeast Texas to Chicago, Illinois on the shores of the Great Lakes in about the same time it would take you to get from Texarkana to El Paso, on Texas' southwestern corner.

So when organizers designed the Rise Across Texas Challenge bike ride, they naturally had to give it Texas-sized dimensions. Starting Saturday, March 6 in the east Texas town of Orange and ending two weeks and 850-miles later in Presidio in southwest Texas, ride participants are raising funds for a three-million dollar capital campaign to build a permanent home for the Rise School of Austin.

Texas' six non-profit Rise Schools provides early childhood education to children with developmental disabilities. Passing through 13 counties, the route was designed by Trek Travel to keep riders on smaller rural roads and passes through some of Texas' most scenic territory plus towns like Marfa, home of the mysterious Marfa lights.

About one-third of the way along, the ride passes through Austin, the place seven-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong likes to be when he's not crushing it on the roads of Europe. For riders not doing the entire event, the March 10 Austin day features a 16-mile celebrity ride from Austin into the gorgeous green Texas Hill Country where riders will fuel up on an authentic Texas barbecue. The ride is open to the public and will include Texas governor Rick Perry, radio and TV personalities, and multi-time Tour de France rider and Armstrong teammate Kevin Livingston. Among other remarkable prizes, each celebrity ride participant will be entered into a raffle for a \$5,000 dollar gift card for Armstrong's Austin bike shop, Mellow Johnny's. \$5k! Can you say, "Hello brand new Trek Madone?"

The Rise Across Texas event was the brainchild of Texas radio entrepreneur and investor Steve Hicks. After visiting a Rise School, he was so touched by the children and their dedicated teachers that he decided to use his 60th birthday as an excuse to generate funds for the Austin school as well as the organization's needs throughout the state. Today, the Austin school shares space with a church, which means teachers have to move out every Friday and move back in on Monday.

On March 9, Hicks and Governor Perry are also hosting a Rise fund-raising birthday bash for themselves—Perry turns sixty this year, too—at the Austin Four Seasons Hotel. Hicks, who sent 100 friends to a tropical island for his 50th birthday, but says he wants to give back this time around, has enlisted musical guests Asleep at the Wheel and mega-star Clint Black to help him ring in his sixth decade (and presumably, sonically soften the effects of riding that proceeds the party.)

The ride concludes on March 19 with a post-ride celebration dinner at Lance Armstrong's house in Marfa, a renown artist town and home of artist Donald Judd.

When asked about the sprawling scope of the ride he started to benefit a worthy non-profit organization, ride founder Hicks was reported saying, "I kind of wish we lived in a smaller state, like Rhode Island."

To learn more about Rise Across Texas, to donate, or to sign up for any of the ancillary events including the birthday bash with Clint Black and the celebrity ride, visit [www.riseacrosstexas.org](http://www.riseacrosstexas.org).

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## "Rise" Rolls into Austin

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On a mission. Riders join the Rise Across Texas campaign for Rise Schools.

Austin greeted day five of the 850-mile, two-week Rise Across Texas fund-raising bike ride with a Texas embrace that extended from warm sunshine to lunch plates heaped with steaming barbecue. After riding 34 miles from Bastrom to Austin in the morning, Rise Across Texas riders were joined by Governor Rick Perry, six-time Tour de France rider Kevin Livingston, and local radio and TV personalities J.B. Hager, and Bob Cole plus nearly 150 local cyclists for a 16-mile ride from the Rise School in southwest Austin through the Hill Country to the Salt Lick restaurant in Driftwood.

The Rise Across Texas ride is generating funds for a three-million-dollar campaign to build a permanent home for the Rise School in Austin, which is currently housed at the Austin's First Evangelical Free Church.

After enjoying a carnival-like party with face-painting, balloons, cotton candy and a barbecue hosted by Salt Lick restaurant at the First Evangelical Free

Church, riders clutched their helmets to their chests for the national anthem, waved good by to a University of Texas cheerleading squad and UT's fierce-looking longhorn mascot Bevo and headed out into 78-degree sunshine. Spring was definitely in the offing today in Austin.

Along with the cyclists, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott, who was partially paralyzed by a tree that fell on him while he was running, did the ride on his hand cycle. NCAA All-American and local running coach and VIP Gilbert Tuhabonye also came out for the day—only he opted to skip the wheels and instead ran the 16-miles. After 90 minutes of riding inside a rolling enclosure protected by police vehicles in front of and behind the riders, the cyclists arrived at the Salt Lick restaurant and were again feted with cookies, beer, and live music. Busses then took the riders back to Austin.

After the celebrity ride, Rise Across Texas Foundation Executive Director Marilyn Carter said she was delighted by the Wednesday afternoon turnout. "Austin has a very enthusiastic bike community," she noted. Lance Armstrong bike shop "Mellow Johnny's came out for bike support and the crowd was just a happy, supportive enthusiastic, get into the fun sort of crowd."

"This ride was to raise money," Carter added, "but also to raise awareness and support. We just want people in the community to know about the cause and get engaged."

At the ride Governor Rick Perry agreed with Carter's assessment that cycling and the Rise School campaign go hand in hand. "Texas is very much known as a cycling friendly state. When you couple that with the Rise School... giving young, special needs kids the opportunity to get in the mainstream of life ... it makes for a great combination; the sum is greater than the parts."



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