

Monarch Community Bank's "Biking Banker" is Pedaling with a Purpose to Fight Childhood Cancer

Marshall, Michigan, April 12, 2006 – After the workday whistle blows Eric Cook, Regional President for Monarch Community Bank, doesn't look like your typical banker. An avid cyclist, Cook trades in his suit and tie for a pair of cycling shorts, jersey and helmet and hits the trail. At one point ranked fourth in the state for mountain bike racing in his age bracket, Cook continues to ride but hasn't raced for several years. But that's all about to change this June.



On the 17th, he'll be returning to the racing scene by competing in Michigan's only 100-mile mountain bike race, called the Lumberjack 100, held at the Big-M Ski Area in the Manistee National Forest. But this time when he races, it's for more than just a medal... he'll be helping to fight cancer.

With each pedal stroke he will be raising money for the Children's Neuroblastoma Cancer Foundation, a non-profit organization founded to help children (and families) battling this rare form of childhood cancer. "It's a great motivation to have so many people supporting me in my race," Cook says. "Every person that makes a donation is going to be right there with me on the trail, only they won't have to pedal."

Selecting the CNCF has a personal meaning to Cook, who in 2001-2003 attended the Graduate School of Banking in Madison, Wisconsin where he met fellow banker Shayne Thomas, of Old Fort Bank in Ohio. The two struck up an immediate friendship that was sure to continue the three years of the program and well into the future. However, after the second of three years, Shayne returned home to discover their then five-year old daughter, Christi, was diagnosed with stage IV Neuroblastoma.

"I was devastated," recalls Cook after hearing the news. "I couldn't even imagine what the family must be going through." Someone that also dabbles in website design, Cook quickly created a website for the family (www.ChristiThomas.com) to share photos and information on how their daughter is doing with family and friends. Today, that site has grown to over 700,000 hits, has several thousand pictures and hundreds of journal entries by family members recounting their journey through this deadly battle.

In December, Cook created a Blog (an online public journal) for the family to make it even easier for them to share their story with friends and family on the Internet. It was just a few months earlier that Shayne competed in the NYC Marathon for Fred's Team to benefit Sloane-Kettering Memorial Hospital in New York City where Christi has received treatment throughout her battle against the deadly disease.

"I was inspired by Shayne's dedication to help raise money for such a great cause and wanted to do my part," says Cook. "With my cycling background I figured it would be a great way to get back into racing, but at the same time help me give something back to an organization that needs my help."

"We're elated to have Eric helping to raise money for us," says Patricia Tallungan, Director of the CNCF. "I have met the Thomas family several times and Christi is a very special little girl. The money Eric raises will help the Foundation fund additional research on this devastating disease so Christi and other children like her will have a better chance at beating the odds. High risk children only have about a 30% chance of survival and most of them are high risk at diagnosis." She continues, "If you want to make a difference now is the time to do it as so many of the kids with neuroblastoma will not have a tomorrow. Your contributions will be the gift of life and ensure a brighter future for all of them."

Christi continues to put up a fight and is currently receiving treatment at Philadelphia's Children's Hospital. Individuals interested in donating to the CNCF and helping support Cook with his fundraising efforts are encouraged to visit his website at www.PedalingWithAPurpose.com and clicking on the



Lumberjack 100 link. There you can donate by credit or debit card. Or, if you prefer, donations can also be sent directly to Eric Cook in care of Monarch Community Bank, 107 North Park Ave., Marshall, MI 49068 with checks made payable to "CNCF".

For Additional Information Contact:

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Additional Websites of Interest

Pedaling with a Purpose (PWP): www.pedalingwithapurpose.com
Eric's Blog: www.ericcook.blogspot.com
Christi's Website: www.christithomas.com
Christi's Blog: www.christithomas.blogspot.com
Children's Neuroblastoma Cancer Foundation: www.cncf-childcancer.org

Looking for a unique way to help raise money for your non-profit organization or charity? Become a PWP-supported event and contact Eric at eric@eggott.com or (269) 660-0171 and have him "Pedal for your Purpose".