

## Spinning their wheels

Contributed by Kris Kitto  
04/22/08 04:20 PM [ET]

While most of their Hill colleagues are still wiping the sleep from their eyes, Philip Schmidt, Laurel Brown and Erica Price are straddling their bikes, ruddy-cheeked and feeling punchy.

It's a Thursday morning shortly before 7:30 a.m., and the trio, each in red-and-white spandex, have just finished racing one another and a few of their other cycling friends several times around a five-mile loop near the Tidal Basin during one of their regular training sessions.

"Everybody starts out saying, 'Today's going to be a chill ride,'" says Brown, 26, press assistant on the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee. But their competitive spirit doesn't allow for it.

"Suddenly we're going 30 miles per hour, and no one can breathe," she says.

In post-training banter, the athletes joke about training mishaps and oddities of the routes they ride. Schmidt, 30, who is Rep. José Serrano's (D-N.Y.) communications director, points to a nearby curb and recounts the time he smashed into it on his bike and splayed onto the grass. On this morning, the crew chuckles about one of the course's main obstacles for the day: an abandoned wig lying in the middle of the road.

"We were trying to get the last person to pick it up and wear it," Brown says.

But their training sessions aren't only about generating laughs. Schmidt, Brown and Price, 25, a fundraiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, are preparing for their June Race Across America, whose daunting slogan is: "World's Toughest Bicycle Race."

Schmidt and three other local cyclists will ride more than 3,000 miles from Oceanside, Calif., to Annapolis, Md., while Brown and Price are a part of the 19-member crew in charge of helping them finish the race, providing food, water and navigation. The challenge for the team, known as Xtreme4, is to navigate the country's varied terrain, monitor the cyclists' nutrition, health and safety, and reach the finish line first in a non-stop race against the clock.

The team members field the obvious question - why? - with answers characteristic of people who live in a city filled with future presidents, former Peace Corps volunteers and summa cum laude graduates.

"It's a feeling of accomplishment based on hard work," says Schmidt, who notes he ran last month's National Marathon, his first, in 2 hours and 58 minutes, qualifying him for the elite Boston Marathon. He added that he placed third in a 7.5-mile, 3.5-hour swim across the Potomac River.

Many of the Xtreme4 team members met through the D.C. Triathlon Club and share both Schmidt's talent and drive to compete in events that challenge the human body's capacity for strength and endurance. They talk about their dedication to sports as an addiction, an ongoing competition to best themselves and a great source of satisfaction.

Their leader is Eric Goetz, 37, a D.C.-based Web designer who has biked the country east to west twice, north to south twice, and made trips between Toronto and Providence, R.I.; and Rome and Barcelona. He has dreamed about the Race Across America since 1993.

Price, who only recently started biking but has swum competitively since childhood, says she enjoys events such as other bike races and triathlons because she can measure her progress concretely by comparing her finish times - a method that parallels the numbers goals she uses to monitor her success as a political fundraiser.

"That personality type is probably very common on the Hill in general," she says in talking about her attention to detail and desire to push herself beyond her comfort level. "It's that &hellip; kind of competitive drive, either academically, or in fundraising, or in sports."

Schmidt and Brown see similarities between their dedication to sports training and their work on the Hill. Schmidt draws on the discipline it takes to get up for 5 a.m. workouts to stay focused at the office. For Brown, participating in such physically demanding activities makes everyday work seem easy.

"Once you start completing these extreme events, you feel so much more able to take anything on," she says. "You just think, &lsquo;Oh, if I can ride 100 miles, I can definitely complete this memo.' "

Another force driving Xtreme4 team members is that they want people to think about the environment and to promote transportation alternatives - such as biking to work. The team asks participants to suspend use of their cars on the week of the race or offset their carbon use by purchasing credits through a deal with an environmental organization, Native Energy. (Team members say this would cost about \$12 per ton of carbon used; the typical American uses approximately one ton of carbon per week.)

The team has also undertaken a monumental fundraising effort, since the 23-person crew carries considerable costs for its two cars, one RV, food and supplies. They hope to raise \$40,000.

Demonstrating they will do anything for their cause, Xtreme4 members are holding a date auction tonight at the Hawk &lsquo;n' Dove bar to raise funds. Schmidt, Brown and Price are expected to be on the auction block.

In another moment of modesty, Schmidt says he will be happy "if I get anything over 15 bucks."

As the race date draws near, team members continue to plan their route, look for more donors, disseminate their alternative-transportation message, and train. Last weekend they ran a 12-hour mock race in Maryland so team members could get used to their roles.

Though she's keeping her eye on the team's fundraising goals, Price is trying to maintain a broader perspective.

"I'm a little bit of an idealist, and it's really exciting to be a part of something that's bigger than yourself and that you'll be able to tell stories about for the rest of your life," she said.

For more information on the Xtreme4 Race Across America team, go to [www.xtreme4.com](http://www.xtreme4.com) .

To bid on a date with Schmidt, Brown, Price or other team members, go to the Hawk &lsquo;n' Dove, 329 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, on Wednesday, April 23, from 6 to 9 p.m. The \$10 cover charge goes to Xtreme4, and there will be \$2 drink specials.