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COURIER photo/Gabriel Fenoy

Cyclists Ali Amiri, left, and Kristian Dorken kickoff their cross-country ride from Pitzer College as children and teens from SuperCamp run behind them.

Cyclists peddle message of passion

A rush of cheers came from a crowd of people gathered at the corner of Mills Avenue and 9th Street around 1:30 p.m. on Monday as two cyclists put their feet to the pedals in order to start an ambitious journey. The atmosphere of excitement resembled that of a small parade.

Unleash America's Passion (UAP) representatives Nicole McCance, Christy Maltman, Ali Amiri, Kristian Dorken and Shah Mohamed will be on the road for the next 10 weeks, traveling from Claremont all the way to New York while helping youth across the country discover their passions along the way.

"Challenging ourselves to cycle 4000 miles across the country is putting ourselves on the line to show youth that they can achieve their own dreams when they are fully committed," said Mr. Amiri, co-director of UAP.

The organization's mission is to inspire thousands of youth to discover their potential and passions so they can create their ideal lives. UAP operates under the support of the Learning Forum Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to youth and learning.

Some of the stops along the way to New York City for the UAP team will include various Boys & Girls Clubs of America, juvenile detention centers and various universities. At the numerous stops, the UAP representatives plan to help teens discover their passions in life through a process called The Passion Test, recently used at a 10-day SuperCamp at the Claremont Colleges.

“Providing self-development tools to discover what it is that really matters to them will put the focus of these kids on creating positive change in their lives,” said Mr. Dorken, also co-director of UAP. “By aligning teens with their passions, we will empower them to make significant positive decisions and resist the pressure for self-destructive behavior from their peers.”

Nearly 150 teens were the latest beneficiaries of UAP’s efforts in Claremont before the team began the cross-country journey. On Monday, the atmosphere was upbeat and filled with enthusiasm as Mr. Amiri and Mr. Dorken took the group through The Passion Test, allowing the teens to pinpoint their passions.

The exercise was part of the SuperCamp experience held at the Claremont Colleges, which gave the teens a chance to experience life on a college campus. The camp is an outreach of Quantum Learning Network (QLN), an education and training organization based in Oceanside.

“We’ve been doing this for 26 years and we get very good results,” said Bobbi DePorter, president of QLN. “The camp is a place where kids learn about themselves and get excited about learning about themselves. Seventy-three percent of those who participate improve their grades in school.”

Today’s ride will bring the UAP representatives to Hesperia. The first major stop on the west-to-east coast journey will be in Las Vegas. Before coming to Claremont, Mr. Amiri and Mr. Dorken had just finished executing the passion program in Seattle.

This year’s 10-week cycling trip won’t be the first that the duo of Mr. Amiri and Mr. Dorken has taken. In 2005, the two traveled from Vancouver to Calgary via bicycle on an 18-day Canadian trip and are always looking forward to the next challenge.

“We rode thousands of miles across Canada. Then we figured that since we’ve done Canada, let’s do something else,” Mr. Dorken said. “We love cycling and doing things that are extreme. We also love creating challenges and inspiring other people to live their dreams.”

The cyclists will be on a liquid diet throughout their trip and will do a great portion of their riding in the earlier and later parts of the day. The middle of the day will be used as a resting period.

With the thousands of miles that will be undertaken by the UAP team, Mr. Amiri not only hopes to positively impact teens throughout the country but also hopes that the ride itself will be of inspiration to youth.

“Research shows that teens give into peer pressure because they don’t have other dreams. So once they found out their passion, they’ll be able to follow that instead of giving into peer pressure,” Mr. Amiri said. “Drugs, alcohol, violence and living on the streets will pale in comparison to the excitement and challenge of living your dreams.”

—Landus Rigsby