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MIZZOU

Gaining Speed

Five Mizzou alumni ride for Joplin.



A team of 30 cyclists — including five MU alumni — departed Joplin, Mo., June 20 and arrived in New Orleans June 29 in an effort to raise awareness and funds to support the ongoing recovery of areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, the Joplin tornado and Hurricane Sandy. Photo courtesy of Toby Teeter.

Story by Kelsey Allen

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Six days in, Toby Teeter had to trade in his wheels for a better bicycle. The avid triathlete had taken a bike made for a 15-mile race on a 10-day, 830-mile journey, and things were getting a

little uncomfortable.

“I brought a sword to a gunfight,” admits Teeter, JD ’99.

But he kept pedaling for the cause after he upgraded to a road bike. The JOMONOLA (Joplin, Mo., to New Orleans, La.) Bicycle Tour departed Joplin, Mo., June 20 and arrived in New Orleans June 29 in an effort to raise awareness and funds to support the ongoing recovery of areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, the Joplin tornado and Hurricane Sandy. The tour, organized by relief organizations that build homes for those who lost theirs in the storms, set a goal to raise enough money to build a home for a family in all three areas.



Five Mizzou alumni participated in the 10-day, 800-mile JOMONOLA Bicycle Tour that raised \$150,000 to build three houses for families displaced by disasters. From left: Theo Holtwick, Brad Barton, Sam Wimsett, Toby Teeter and Joe Craigmile. Photo courtesy of Toby Teeter.

When fellow Joplin resident Joe Craigmile, BA ’85, heard about the trip, he wanted to participate. He had donated money, but the gesture seemed impersonal, Craigmile says. The physical and mental challenge of the bike ride got his attention, which is exactly what the fundraiser organizers were hoping.

“We’re two years out from the storm, and a lot of other communities have been affected by severe weather,” Craigmile says.

“Joplin is yesterday’s news. But there are still tons of displaced people. Although we’ve come a long way,

there's still a long way to go.”

Thirty riders, including five Mizzou grads, were tasked with raising a minimum of \$2,500 before departing, and more would be raised along the way through presentations at churches, media events and online sponsorships. When the crew left Joplin, they were about \$30,000 short of their \$150,000 goal.

But in every city along the way, the cyclists encountered a spirit of generosity.

“This one gal in this little run-down convenience store in southern Arkansas heard what we were doing,” Craigmile recalls. “She gave us her tip money for the day: \$6.75.”

He recounts another encounter with a family in Clarksville, Ark., sitting on their dilapidated porch at 10 a.m. to escape 100-plus temperatures indoors. After explaining why a group of 30 dressed in JOMONOLA gear was barreling down their small-town roads — Craigmile received a resounding, “You guys are crazy!” — one of the young men pulled him aside.

“He said, ‘I know it’s not much, but we really want to help out,’ ” Craigmile says. The man handed him \$2. “But that’s money they could have obviously used.”

By the time the riders finally pedaled into

Documenting Joplin

Most days, KOMU 8 news anchor Jim Riek and former KOMU 8 meteorologist Michelle Bogowith, BA '08, MS '11, report from in front of the camera. But after the tornado ripped through Joplin May 22, 2011, the broadcast journalists made 39 trips to Joplin, documenting their experiences and the stories of those affected.

Riek and Bogowith co-wrote the e-book *Joplin: Our Words, Our Stories, Their Hope* (Amazon Digital Services, 2013). Along with the accounts of two dozen other KOMU student reporters, the book documents the

New Orleans, greeted by 200 supporters and a New Orleans jazz band, they had met their fundraising goal.

“What was interesting, toward the end of the ride, I was eager to get to the finish line,” says Teeter, adding that the triple-digit heat index didn’t make anything easier. “But with about 20 miles to go, I didn’t want it to end. I realized how much fun I was having.”

Other Mizzou riders were:

- Brad Barton, of Webb City, Mo., JD '03
- Sam Wimsett, of Terrace Park, Ohio, BS '03
- Theo Holtwick, of Fayette, Mo., BA '08

yearlong coverage that helped keep Joplin, its people and its need, in the spotlight.

“Along the way, we developed a very special relationship with the city and its people,” Riek writes in the introduction. “We listened to their stories, shed tears alongside them and commemorated difficult milestones with the community. This book highlights a year’s worth of blood, sweat and tears from a small news station 230 miles away in Columbia, Mo.”

The book, edited by Dani Wexelman, BJ '11, is available at [Amazon Books](#). All processed from sales go to the group [Rebuild Joplin](#).

Topics: [Alumni](#), [Web Exclusives](#)

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