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Bike ride for safe children

10th annual event is Sunday

By Lisa D. Welsh TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

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WORCESTER— On Sept. 15, 1998, Ann McCarron finished a 50-day 3,478-mile bicycle trip from San Diego to Assumption College and launched a community-wide effort to help prevent child sexual abuse like she had experienced as a child.

“The bike across America was the easy part. Talking about it was the hard part,” said Ms. McCarron, recreation director at Assumption College.

The Voices for Children Community Bike Ride will mark its 10th anniversary Sunday. Registration opens at 8 a.m. and the 50-mile ride begins at 9 a.m. At 10 a.m. are a 1- to 5-mile ride and 10- and 25-mile rides. All rides start at Assumption College, 500 Salisbury St.

The family event also includes a moon walk, concessions and live entertainment. All proceeds raised from Voices for Children Bike Ride will be donated to CASA and the Child Assault Prevention Program, which were chosen for their commitment to child advocacy and the prevention of child sexual assault.

One of the important things Voices for Children does is teach parents the tools they need when communicating with their children. It draws attention to an issue that children do not often talk about being a victim because they don't know how to or what to call it.

This year is especially significant to Ms. McCarron because her son, Quinn, is 7 years old, the same age she was, she said, when her pediatrician started sexually abusing her.

“Quinn just turned 7. I look at him and it's so hard to think, that's when my abuse started,” she said.

“When I'm dropping him off at flag football, I wonder ‘Is he going to be safe?’ He knows my story and why I did the bike ride.”

Ms. McCarron's story includes five years when the family's doctor continued the abuse and told her she would go to jail if she told anyone. She kept the secret for 20 years and engaged in self-destructive behavior.

“People did not want to hear about it, or they didn't believe you,” said Ms. McCarron. “They turned away; they wondered, ‘Where is he now?’ ‘How come you



Ann McCarron, founder of the Voices for Children Community Bike Ride, enjoys a moment with her 7-year-old son, Quinn, at the duck pond at Assumption College yesterday. (T&G Staff/CHRISTINE PETERSON)

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didn't say anything sooner?"

Today, one out of four girls and one out of six boys will be sexually abused before they are 18 years old, according to Voices for Children, an organization Ms. McCarron founded to raise funds and awareness for local agencies committed to child advocacy. Most of those will suffer from abuse by a trusted family member or friend.

Holden Police Chief George R. Sherrill has been involved with Voices for Children ever since Ms. McCarron spoke on the issue when a sex offender moved close to the Rice School playground in town.

"We know who the sex offenders are in town. Ann helped everyone understand that it's the ones that you don't know that you need to worry about," said Chief Sherrill, who will ride again this year and provide security for the Voices for Children event with the members of Holden's police bike patrol.

"Ann did such a great job for us. You could see that she talks from the heart," he said. "I commend her for coming out publicly. It's a traumatic thing to go through, then to go come out publicly was really something."

Last year, when the town of Holden tried to pass a bylaw prohibiting a sex offender from living a certain distance from a public park, Ms. McCarron was able to help residents understand that such a bylaw would only provide a false sense of security. The bylaw was ultimately defeated.

"As parents, we want to protect our children," Ms. McCarron said. "The bottom line is we are not going to be with them 24 hours a day. We want them to be independent and we need to give them the tools to do that. If something feels confusing or it doesn't feel right, we need to give them the power to say 'No!'"



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