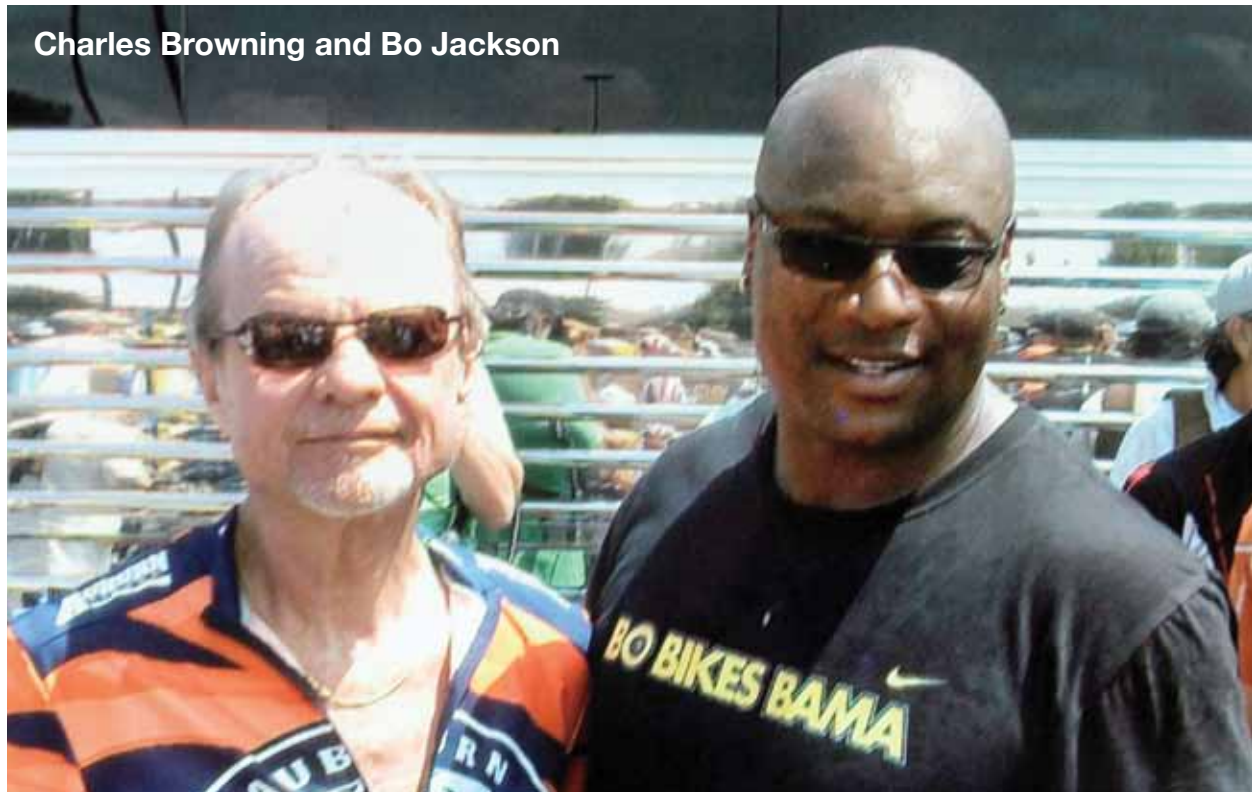


# *Biking with Bo*

Pell City resident cycles with the stars to raise money and awareness for tornado-ravaged parts of Alabama



Charles Browning and Bo Jackson

Story by **Loyd McIntosh**  
Photos by **Jerry Martin**  
Submitted Photos

Two days, 115 miles. That's the time and distance Pell City resident Charles Browning spent perched on a bicycle seat this spring. Riding from Cullman to Bessemer, Browning rubbed elbows with some big names in the world of sports — Auburn legend Bo Jackson, seven-time Tour de France Champion Lance Armstong and Olympic skier Picabo Street, just to name a few. His close-encounter-of-the-famous-kind came while participating in the Bo Bikes Bama initiative to raise money for Alabama tornado victims.

If you think this was all about getting up-close-and-personal with the world of celebrities, you can forget it. Browning's motivation was, simply put, to serve his fellow man while participating in one of his favorite activities — bicycling.

Browning got into long-distance cycling after recovering from heart surgery about six years ago, working his way up to riding in several century rides of 100 miles though the years. However, the fit and trim Browning was forced to take some time off from biking after suffering a nasty accident in October

2011. While riding in the MS 150 in Orange Beach, Browning's bike blew a tire, sending him crashing to the pavement and into rehab.

"I've never imagined blowing a tube out and what might occur if you were running 25 miles per hour. It just went into a shimmy, like a car would go into, and I went across the handlebars," Browning says. "I cracked the helmet real bad on the right side, had three stitches in my head, three rib fractures, and my pelvis fractured in two places. I never imagined such a thing occurring."

The spill also cost Browning his bike, snapping the frame into two pieces. But Browning didn't sit around long. Six weeks of rehab and a new two-wheeler later, Browning was back on his bike and riding in his first long-distance ride since the accident — the 2012 Cheaha Challenge. Billed as "The Toughest Ride In The South," Browning rode the 66-mile route from Piedmont to Mount Cheaha on Sunday, April 22, finishing the ride number 44 out of 78 riders.

Feeling positive about his ride and his injuries healed, Browning decided to register to ride on the Bo Bikes Bama tour less than a week later. With a goal of raising \$1 million for the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund, Bo Bikes Bama began in



# WE LOVE THIS LAKE... HELP US PROTECT IT.

Logan Martin Lake is a precious resource for our area. The Logan Martin Lake Protection Association works hard to make sure that our lake stays clean, full, and safe.

But our work is never done. Logan Martin continues to be threatened by cross-state water wars, excessive downstream recreational releases, and polluters.

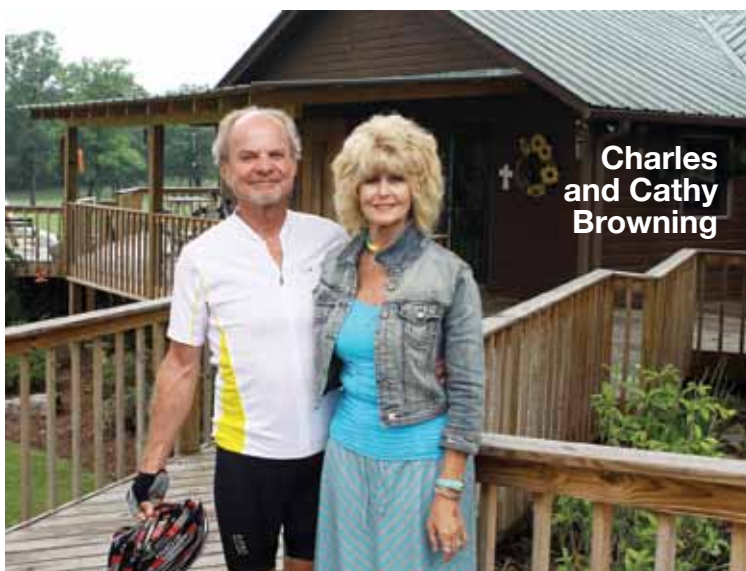
We need your support to continue to protect Logan Martin Lake.

To learn how you can be involved or to join LMLPA please visit [www.lmlpa.org](http://www.lmlpa.org), or [www.facebook.com/protectloganmartin](https://www.facebook.com/protectloganmartin).





## Biking with Bo



**Charles  
and Cathy  
Browning**



**Lance  
Armstrong  
and Bo  
Jackson**

the Henagar community of DeKalb County and, over a five-day period, wound through some of the communities most affected by the deadly tornadoes of April 27, 2011, coming to an end in Tuscaloosa.

Riding alongside Jackson, Browning had a chance to talk to the Heisman Trophy winner and gain a little insight into the man and his mission to help people throughout his home state. Browning says he spent quite a bit of time in conversation with Jackson, talking about anything and everything – except football.

“I think Bo did a very admirable thing. It was a lot of fun to make the investment and pay the fees to ride,” says Browning. “Mind you, I’m not a real big sports fan. I know who Bo Jackson was when he was going through school and that he won the Heisman, but I’m not a die hard fan. I don’t fly the Auburn flag or Alabama flag.”

“I believe Bo Jackson was an Alabamian, not an Auburn player or an Alabama player. I think he was there for Alabama and the people,” Browning added.

Browning also had the chance to talk with Picabo Street, who he says was “well pleased about the turnout and very nice and very friendly.” He also met other riders who came from as far away as Texas and California to be part of this historic ride.

Browning rode the two-day trek from Cullman to Bessemer, a route that also took riders through the communities of Jasper and Cordova – just to name a few – that were hit hard in the storms of last April. Browning, had already gotten a personal look at the devastation in St. Clair County, having volunteered in Shoal Creek Valley for a few days following the storms.

Biking through central Alabama gave him a different perspective on the intense force of mother nature. “There’s no real way to describe the damage a tornado can do,” says Browning. “I can tell you, or tell so-and-so, but it’s not until you’re sitting there looking at it that you realize it looks like a war zone.”

Of the communities the tour took him through, Browning says Cordova appeared to be the worst hit, and signs of the destruction are still visible well over a year since the storm. He also got a sense of how seemingly arbitrary a tornado can be. For instance, the husband of one of Browning’s nieces works for a bank based out of Jasper with a branch located in a trailer in the middle of downtown Cordova that survived while the rest of the buildings in the town took the brunt of the storm.

The tour avoided the major state and U.S. highways as much as possible, a fact Browning was happy to find out believing much of the ride would take them on the notorious stretch of Highway 69, one of the most dangerous roads in the state. Instead, they biked along many country roads, watching the Alabama landscape unfold in a unique way.

Even on the back roads of rural Alabama, Browning says, people lined up along the roadside, cheering the group of riders on as they passed by en route to the next destination. He says being able to see the reaction of people from devastated communities having their faith and hope restored was powerful and inspirational.

“When we came out of Cullman we went through Arley, Alabama, and then into Jasper, I was amazed at the number of people who came out,” Browning says. “There were people standing out in their yards and up on their front porches.

“There was just a lot of strong support out there from the people. There were a lot of people all along the side of the road, waving flags and carrying on,” Browning says. “When we went to a school above Jasper, there might have been 500 kids out there on the cul-de-sac. It kind of makes you feel like a hero.”

To date, Bo Bikes Bama has raised \$500,000 for victims of the April 27, 2011 tornadoes. To donate, go online to [www.bobikesbama.com](http://www.bobikesbama.com). ●