

Tour De Nebraska rolls through Norfolk

360 people represented 24 states and one other country

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Tour de Nebraska is a five-day bike ride through small-town Nebraska. The route changes every year and, this weekend, for the first time in its 35-year history Tour de Nebraska came through Norfolk.

This year's rider roster included 360 people representing 24 states and one country outside the United States. The ages of riders ranged from 24 to 82 years.

The ride started in Columbus on Tuesday, made its way to Albion and then to Norfolk. The loop-shaped route

took them back to Columbus on Sunday.

Arrived on Friday

Between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Friday, riders arrived in Norfolk on the south side of the YMCA.

Once the riders arrived, finishing a nearly 60-mile ride from Albion, they set up camp. Their luggage was transported between towns for them, so they claimed their bag from the hundreds of duffels.

Traci Jeffries from the Norfolk's Visitors Bureau offered a grab-and-go snack along with information on what

the town offers from restaurants to the sculpture walk. Riders would be spending an entire Saturday in Norfolk before heading back to Columbus.

Rows of tents were already set up upon riders' arrival in town, so they had the option to camp in a ready-made tent outside, make their own camp nearby or opt for sleeping inside the YMCA's fieldhouse.

Ron Beck, a rider from Omaha, made his own camp in the shade among a "neighborhood" of other riders' tents. It was Beck's second year doing Tour

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RON BECK arrives in Norfolk and finds space to set up his tent for the next couple nights.

Tour

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de Nebraska.

The people of Tour de Nebraska are “very nice, very organized, very friendly,” Beck said. “They listen to you if you have a suggestion.”

Beck appreciates being able to stay in Albion and Norfolk for two nights each since it mitigates the need to take down and put together his tent every day, explaining that’s one of the hardest parts of the ride.

Alex Lieb, a rider from Kearney, is one of the younger riders in the group at 27 years old. This was Lieb’s fifth Tour de Nebraska ride, and she used to do the 7 Cities Century bike ride, a two-day, 100-mile route through northwest Nebraska.

“That’s how I met half the tents over there,” Lieb said, gesturing to the growing village of colorful tents in the shade south of Norfolk’s YMCA and praising the feeling of camaraderie and family within Tour de Nebraska.

Lieb said she appreciates the fact that it doesn’t matter how fast you are as a rider. Instead, you’re considered a “good rider” as long as you’re kind and considerate to the riders around you.

Lieb said she was introduced to cycling by her mother, who is now 49 and also completed Tour de Nebraska this weekend.

“A lot of younger people don’t have the time or make the time to ride,” Lieb said.

Lieb’s mother rode Tour de Nebraska several years ago and encouraged Lieb to pursue cycling.

“She told me, ‘You have to start riding your bike. You have to get into cycling. Everybody is so cool and the rides are beautiful,’” Lieb said.

The two attended 7 Cities Century together that year, and Lieb has enjoyed cycling ever since.

After riders had the opportunity to get settled and showered, Tour de Nebraska hosted an informal social at 2 p.m. with drinks.

Later, participants were transported to downtown Norfolk for Friday’s rendition of the Downtown Concert Series featuring Dueling Pianos.

Riders were able to mobile-order dinner from a variety of choices of Norfolk’s downtown restaurants. Viaero Wireless



RIDERS RECOGNIZED for riding 100 miles on Saturday pose for a photo at the Tour de Nebraska awards ceremony at The Cove on Saturday evening.

partnered with Tour de Nebraska so that riders could choose a dining option from their phone, the restaurant of choice would prepare and deliver the meal to River Point Square and riders received a notification that their meal was ready for pickup.

Many options Saturday

Riders had many options for spending their full day in Norfolk on Saturday.

Tour de Nebraska provided two routes for an optional ride that would loop around a few surrounding towns and end back in Norfolk.

North Fork Outfitting offered tubing and kayaking rides on the Elkhorn River as an added excursion as part of an add-on to the ride registration.

In the evening, Tour de Nebraska hosted a street festival that included live music and an awards ceremony at The Cove.

Riders gathered to eat, drink, enjoy music and reminisce the last few days.

“What did you think of the route this year?” a Tour de Nebraska representative asked the crowd.

Claps and cheers erupted from the array of riders gathered both inside and outside the covered venue.

Before the awards ceremony, riders were able to submit favorite memories from the previous days to be read for the crowd. Moments shared included Friday’s sunrise,

enjoying small-town life and generous assistance from a local during a broken bike chain incident.

The Team Spirit Award, a title that recognizes kindness and goodwill, was given to Jon Koeller and his son, David Koeller.

Spirit is an acronym for stamina, personality, inspiration, roughing-it, interest and tipping.

Jon Koeller assisted in financially supporting the founding of Tour de Nebraska’s scholarship program. The program allows four people every year to participate in the Tour de Nebraska ride at no cost. Last year was the program’s first year.

“I hope it helps people to enjoy this wonderful cycling event and help propagate it even further,” Jon Koeller said.

A Tour de Nebraska representative addressed the new riders this year, which made up one-third of the total participants.

“We talk about TDN being a family,” he said. “So we hope you’ve been able to make some new friends.”

Tour de Nebraska officials announced the 2023 ride had a nearly identical number of riders to last year, and they are still trying to recover registration numbers to meet numbers from before COVID-19.

Next year’s Tour de Nebraska ride will take place in the last week of June 2024, and tour organizers challenged current riders to bring a friend next year as the organization seeks to get up to 400 participants.