



The UCI Road World Championships in Richmond, Virginia, will attract professional cyclists from around the globe.

Go time!

Members of the VCU community help land a world-class event in Richmond

By Drew Vass

In September 2015, Richmond, Virginia, joins an elite list of cities — worldwide — as it hosts one of cycling’s premier events: Union Cycliste Internationale’s Road World Championships. Drawing the same athletes as competitions like the Tour de France, Giro d’Italia and Vuelta a Espana, Road World Championships is just one of two events (including the Olympics) allowing racers to separate from their teams in order to pursue the title of world champion. From the initial discussions that resulted in the event’s first stateside appearance in nearly 30 years, to the front lines of planning and medical provisions, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Allied Health Professions alumni have their fingerprints all over the handlebars that are steering UCI through Richmond.

Meanwhile, those individuals say the event is not only changing the face of their careers, but also VCU’s identity as a world-class medical provider. In May 2014, the group proved strong in a warm-up, as they faced down CapTech USA’s Cycling Collegiate Road National Championship with flying colors.



Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe (second from left) and Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones (far right) encourage VCU cyclists competing in a collegiate competition in the city.

And so Jones, shortly after his inauguration, jumped on a bike for his first ride in many years, Cooper says, to pedal into City Hall as part of National Bike to Work Day. Cooper, an avid cyclist of 35 years, rode alongside the mayor. A year or so later, Jones struck out to form a committee aimed at organizing the city’s efforts to become a biking community. Cooper, a prominent figure in Richmond’s health movement and a 27-year member of Bike Virginia, a group that heads up daily rides and annual biking trips around the commonwealth, was a natural selection.

“I said, ‘Please, by all means — put me on it,’” Cooper says.

After graduating from a committee to a 20-member Pedestrian Bicycle and Trails Commission, Cooper says an idea emerged amid one of the group’s monthly meetings: Why not bring UCI’s Road World Championships right here to Richmond? The goal was lofty, no doubt, as it would place the city among such elite names as Melbourne, Australia, Florence, Italy, and Madrid; but to Cooper, who says he was VCU’s unofficial representative on the commission, it was a no-brainer. Positioned at the confluence of major east-west and north-south interstate routes, poised over the backdrop of Class IV rapids, in a region that’s dotted with features like

THE FIRST SEEDS

Backtracking to the first moments that were responsible for bringing the UCI Worlds to Richmond shows that it all started with a bike ride, including two SAHP alums.

“The real story behind this event, in my opinion, starts with the mayor,” says Mark Cooper, D.Min. (Cert. ’75/PC), former chair of the Department of Patient Counseling and the inaugural Rev. Robert B. Lantz Chair, referring to Richmond’s Mayor Dwight C. Jones, a past student of the Department of Patient Counseling. “In his perceptions of what was happening around the nation, among cities poised to emerge, biking was an important component. Portland, Ore., and many other towns proved that having an infrastructure and culture for biking was the way to go.”

#Shift4Health

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT!

Theming its exclusive medical sponsorship of the UCI Road World Championships, VCU Medical Center's university and citywide campaign, "Shift for Health," encourages its team members, families and the entire Greater Richmond community to make small "shifts" in their usual habits for the sake of personal health. Campaign organizers say they're aiming to create legacy effects, one participant at a time, to last far beyond the race's finish line. Personal accomplishments may be shared via Twitter, Instagram and Facebook using #Shift4Health. Visit vcushift.com for details.

#Shift4Health suggestions:



Walk it off: Start with 1,000 steps a day, with the goal of building to 10,000



Stress break: Schedule five minutes per day to relax — every day



Hit the bottle: Substitute a bottle of water for one sugary drink per day



Snack attack: Keep healthy snacks at hand to stave off sugary competitors



Attitude adjustment: Challenge yourself to start each day with an outlook of gratitude and then find the good in everything you encounter

cobblestone roads and scenic by-ways — Richmond marked a prime spot for any world-class outdoor event. Add to that a Level 1 trauma center and major medical provider in VCU and causes for skepticism coast to a stop.

Exactly how the details unfold between the commission's first efforts to bring Richmond to UCI's attention and the city's selection on Sept. 21, 2011, as the UCI Worlds host, Cooper admits is a bit murky. He says the task eventually transferred to "men and women in suits." But the fact is, the plan worked. And come September 2015, more than 1,000 of the world's most elite athletes and approximately 450,000 spectators will be landing in Richmond. All in all, the event is expected to pump approximately \$158 million into Virginia's economy.

"This is the Olympics of biking," Cooper says. "And it's coming right here to Richmond."

And VCU Medical Center will serve as the event's exclusive medical provider.

LET THE GRIND BEGIN

A lot of midnight candle wax must burn between the acceptance of VCU's bid and its successful performance as an exclusive medical provider to a world-class sporting event. When John Duval, vice president for clinical services and CEO of VCU Hospitals, penned a deal with the event's organizers, he knew this well. And two of the first individuals he recruited for the gargantuan task are SAHP alums.

"We took our strengths into consideration, and then we divided to conquer," says Robin Manke (B.S. '93/OT), manager of emergency management, VCU Medical Center, who accepted the responsibilities of planning logistics for VCU's medical provisions, as well as university operations and emergency preparedness amid the event. She's joined by Alexa Warner (M.H.A. '14/HA), administrative project manager, VCU Health System, who serves as manager of communications for VCU's medical sponsorship and the media strategist who spearheads the university's efforts to capitalize on a worldwide audience. In May 2013, the duo faced a critical precursor when Richmond hosted another of cycling's premiere events: the 2014 CapTech USA Cycling Collegiate Road National Championship, which is no world championship, but no small venue in its own right. The collegiate event included three days of racing, drawing approximately 400 athletes and several thousand spectators — a perfect testing ground for VCU's abilities.

"That was a dress rehearsal for the whole city, ahead of the UCI event," Warner says.

More than 50 athletes were treated amid the collegiate races, for needs ranging from cramps and dehydration to abrasions. Meanwhile, logistical challenges were faced down



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— ROBIN MANKE (B.S. '93/OT), VCU MEDICAL CENTER

throughout the university's campus, including everything from patient transportation and access, to supply deliveries. Any hiccup would serve as a red flag for the world championship's organizers, who were no doubt watching, but VCU passed with flying colors.

"It was a true success," Manke says. "UCI said it was one of the best medical operations it had ever seen."

The differences between collegiate nationals and UCI's World Championships are no doubt exponential. At 1,000, the number of athletes is more than double, while the 450,000 spectators UCI is expected to draw to the region dwarfs the several thousand Richmond witnessed in its precursor.

"It's forcing the university to review and evaluate everything from how it gets patients into its facilities, to communications throughout the university and city," Manke says, who's collaborating with law enforcement and emergency response officials throughout Richmond.

BUYING POWER

If you're wondering what's in it for the university, which, no doubt, paid a substantial sum to become the official medical sponsor, you should know that the move represents the largest media buy in VCU's history, placing the university's brand messaging before a global audience of approximately 300 million, via 500 media outlets.

"From a marketing standpoint, this is a huge opportunity, because we're going through a rebranding process," Warner says.

"In the absence of an event like this, getting that message out to a global audience is a hugely expensive — if not impossible — task. We have an opportunity here to spread our branding messages at the highest possible level. This is a game changer."

But Warner points out that VCU's role as the exclusive medical sponsor for a world-class event also offers a message to the university's internal audience.

"We know what we're capable of and what we do every day, but this is validation at the highest level that we are what we think we are," she says. "This event will not only show the world, but also us, that we can do more than just provide top-flight health care and produce world-class education

and research. We also can do event medicine at the highest level. That places us on a very short list of providers worldwide."

And according to at least two physical therapists and SAHP alumni who participated in the collegiate event, staffing the university's medical tents amid UCI's Road World Championships marks a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for career advancement.

"In our clinic, all of our therapists hold the same goal of becoming sports clinical specialists within the next year," says Rebecca Moran, D.P.T., a physical therapist in VCU's Sports Medicine Clinic and a member of SAHP's affiliate faculty. "In order to do that, you have to come in contact with a certain number of sports injuries. You also have to become a first responder. This is a rare opportunity to move our goals way forward, almost instantly."

Ahead of their volunteer services, Moran and other physical therapists from the sports medicine clinic crossed one of those hurdles by completing the Red Cross's first responder program.

"This event is just part of the bigger picture for us, as we develop our sports center," says D.S. Blaise Williams III, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Physical Therapy and director of the VCU Run Lab in the College of Humanities and Sciences, who organized the group's participation in first responder courses. "That on-field opportunity to see acute injury situations, how we deal with them and what happens in the moment of the injury, helps us as therapists to understand what we're going to deal with when it comes to rehabilitation. It's somewhat unique for physical therapists to be involved in that acute phase and, so, that's a tremendous learning opportunity."

NO TIME FOR SLEEP

Moran and Williams attend monthly meetings in order to plan not only how they will serve in VCU's medical tents, but also how they'll continue to maintain hours of operation for their clinic's patients, who can't afford to put their treatments on hold because UCI is coming to town. That, they say, will require extending their schedules beyond the 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. hours of medical tent operations. At the same time, they're plotting to accommodate a 24-hour care center.

"When it's 10 o'clock at night and one of these athletes has a cramp or a pain in one of their limbs that they thought would be okay, they can come in and see sports medicine," Williams says.

It goes without saying that, if the university had control over worse-case scenarios, those aches and pains would be the extent of necessary medical treatments. But the fact is, Manke says, that any time you draw thousands of spectators to a highly publicized and extremely accessible event, the worst has to be accounted for.

"We have nearly 500,000 people coming to downtown Richmond," Manke says. "Aside from being the official medical sponsor, we're critical infrastructure. This isn't just putting up tents and taking care of cycling patients. As the region's only Level 1 trauma center, our role is much larger than that."



The successful 2014 CapTech USA Cycling Collegiate Road National Championship in Richmond, Virginia, showed that the city was ready to host the UCI Worlds.

To define larger, she harkens back to April 15, 2013, when terrorists struck the Boston Marathon. For this reason, Manke says the university has its employees undergoing extensive training to prepare them for any situation. This includes Internet-based training by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as well as running simulations among VCU's emergency medical departments and personnel. Going forward, it's these preparations that she says will change the university's operations, indefinitely.

"This is growing us as an organization, to a new level of preparedness," she says. "That's not going to go away once this event is over. We're going to be on a new level from here out."

Drew Vass is a contributing writer for VCU Allied Health.



Gearing up for safety

AS ENTHUSIASM BUILDS AROUND CYCLING, ONE PT FACULTY MEMBER SEIZES THE MOMENT FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

In addition to serving on the Pedestrian Bicycle and Trails Commission partly responsible for bringing the UCI Worlds to Richmond, Sheryl Finucane, Ph.D., assistant professor and graduate program director for the Department of Physical Therapy, now aims to convert Richmonders' attention to cycling into increased awareness for traffic safety (among bikers and motorists alike). Biking has been a way of life for this PT instructor, who made two failed attempts at switching over to automobiles — once in college, then again in graduate school — before jumping back on a bicycle as her primary mode of transportation.

After tuning in to what she describes as "bizarre and often dangerous driving habits" over the years, Finucane set out to make Richmond a safer place to ride by becoming one of the

city's first League of American Bicyclists' Traffic Skills instructors. Leading up to the UCI Worlds, she says she's noticed an influx of course participants, which she intends to magnify through social media and other marketing efforts. "Getting people to think about driving while they're driving and biking while they're biking — that's the goal that will keep us all safe," she says.

Tips for bicyclists: Following the rules, using appropriate road positioning and hand signals, maintaining proper control of your bike and knowing how to navigate around hazards are your first line of defense.

Tips for motorists: Never pass bikers without first changing lanes, be patient (if you're going to turn soon, stay behind) and always assume that you will encounter bicyclists or pedestrians.