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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Photos included**Lake Loop draws runners, bikers, and paddlers to State Park**

LANDING, N.J. (October 14, 2019) — The seventh annual Lake Loop attracted a few hundred people to Hopatcong State Park on Sunday, Oct. 13. Guests laced up sneakers, mounted bicycles, and slipped into kayaks to participate in the popular fundraiser for the Lake Hopatcong Foundation. Live the Lake NJ was the main sponsor of the event.

“The Lake Loop is an event that brings together all kinds of folks to be healthy, have fun, and enjoy the views of beautiful Lake Hopatcong,” said Jessica K. Murphy, president of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation. “We are so fortunate to have a stellar volunteer team, led by Becky Rubenstein, who make this day possible, along with a collection of generous sponsors that help make sure participants have delicious food, great music, and everything they need to enjoy a lovely day on and around the lake. And of course, we appreciate every participant who made the Lake Loop part of their weekend, and in the process helped support the LHF’s efforts to protect the lake environment and enhance the lake experience.”

A pink-tinted sunrise greeted the earliest-arriving participants, mostly colorfully clad cyclists who slowly walked their two-wheelers toward the registration table. Among them was Mercedes Proano, a first timer at Lake Loop who spotted the event on Facebook.

While the 62-year-old Belleville resident could have chosen to pedal the 20- or 40-mile route around Lake Hopatcong, she wanted to attempt the challenging 62-mile circuit.

“I just started riding seriously this year,” said Proano eagerly, as she donned a helmet and yanked her bicycle out the back of her SUV. “I’ve been doing 40- or 50-mile loops around Saddle Brook Park, but I really want to ride [the same distance as] my age.”

Joined by about three dozen other cyclists, Proano pedaled out of the State Park at 8 a.m., unaware that she was in for the ride of her life. We’ll catch up with her later.

A little later, about a hundred cyclists doing the shorter routes were sent off and runners began to arrive for the mid-morning start of a 5k jaunt that would include a rocky trail up a hill through the woods and a stretch along the State Park beach.

Dave Sheldon, 28, and Giulia Picascia, 27, both first timers from Middletown, had noticed Lake Loop flyers at a bagel shop in Landing during a visit to Sheldon’s parents’ home in Hopatcong.

With bibs pinned on, they started the 5k run with about a hundred other participants, some of whom opted to take a more leisurely 1.5-mile trek.

Asked about their favorite part of their Lake Loop day, Sheldon quipped, “The finish line... the hill in the woods was so steep, I couldn’t even catch my breath when I started to just walk up it.”

“I didn’t think [Lake Loop] would be this much fun,” said Picascia, after enjoying a post-race beer and some live music. “It’s such a nice community event. There was no real pressure to compete, so anyone could come out, join in and just have some fun.”

Around noon, about a score of people made their way to the beach to paddle a loop around the southern end of the lake. Most made their way onto the water in kayaks, but several opted for stand-up paddle boards or canoes.

About an hour after setting out in a kayak, volunteers pulled Jay Scanlon back up on the beach. It was the second Lake Loop for the 62-year-old Hopatcong resident, who was accompanied by his sister and a family friend.

“I first heard about this through an email and, really, it’s announced all over the place,” said Scanlon, standing on the beach under blue skies feathered with clouds. “It’s a nice, leisurely paddle so we’re chatting as we go along. [Lake Loop] will probably become a regular thing for us, especially if we get more days like this. It’s just really enjoyable.”

At about 1:30 p.m., as the event was coming to a close, Andrew Reaves walked across the parking lot, carrying a large box as he headed for his car.

It was a big day for the 27-year-old Howell resident, who got his money’s worth out of the event. He did the 40-mile bike ride, the 5k run, the paddle, and won an inflatable kayak as a raffle prize—not bad for a Lake Loop newcomer.

“I was home on Monday and saw some road bikers going by. I thought I’d look for an opportunity to bike, so I Googled ‘bike events near me’,” he explained. “This came up first, so I decided to come. My friend had been trying to get me to buy a kayak, so it was a great coincidence to win one.”

By mid-afternoon, volunteers were breaking down table and folding up chairs to wrap up the day... but wait. Mercedes Proano was still nowhere in sight, more than six hours after starting her bike ride.

Lake Loop organizers were able to contact her by phone and learned she was still about six miles out. She was tracked down by a volunteer in a car, who was willing to drive her back to the State Park but encouraged her to finish the ride.

About a half-hour later, a determined Proano pedaled her way across the parking lot to the finish line and was cheered in by a dozen people who had assembled for her arrival.

“Even when I was offered a ride, I still wanted to finish on my own. I had to,” she said. “I wasn’t used to all the hills, so I had to walk up some of them. I also took some breaks and was able to take some pictures because the scenery was so beautiful. Now I know what it’s like, so I’ll be better prepared for the ride next year.”

Proceeds from Lake Loop benefit the Lake Hopatcong Foundation, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to protecting the lake environment and enhancing the lake experience by bringing together public and private resources to encourage a culture of sustainability and stewardship on and around New Jersey’s largest lake, for this and future generations. To learn more, visit lakehopatcongfoundation.org.

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Mercedes Proano is all smiles after completing the 62-mile bike ride at Lake Loop 2019. Photo Courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation



Giulia Picascia runs the 5k at Lake Loop 2019, while Dave Sheldon looks on after completing his run. Photo Courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation



Paddle participants for Lake Loop 2019 get ready for their 2.5-mile paddle around Lake Hopatcong. Photo Courtesy of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation