

Recalling a CPA who gave of himself

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**By ALEX NUSSBAUM
STAFF WRITER**

MAHWAH - Even after cancer claimed the fibula bone in his right leg, Jim Kallas didn't slow down.

The accountant from Paramus lived at full speed, friends said, whether he was raising money for charity or attacking the ski slopes, skydiving, strumming a jazz guitar, or pursuing his other hobbies.

So when doctors operated in January 2002 to remove cancer in his lower leg, Kallas was characteristically determined.

"He would wrap up his leg, get his leg stable and get out there," said his wife, Colleen. "Riding his bike, skiing - the doctors were speechless when they heard that. Nothing stopped him."

Kallas, 46, died of cancer in March. He was honored on Sunday by the partners in another of his passions - the Bergen Bike Tour, the annual fund-raiser that's raised nearly a half-million dollars for charity since Kallas helped found the event in 1996.

Some 250 bicyclists set out from Darlington County Park in Mahwah on 10- to 50-mile circuits around northern Bergen County.

Expected to raise \$100,000, the tour was dedicated to Kallas |this year.

"He had a heart of pure gold," said Janet Sharma, executive director of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, a fellow organizer. "I think he wanted to show that accountants weren't just dry numbers people. He really cared about serving the community he worked in."

The money is split by the Volunteer Center and the Tomorrows Children's Fund, a Hackensack-based group that helps children with cancer and serious blood disorders, and their families. Whether it was the cause, or the gorgeous weather, a record number of riders took to the roads.

"It's a good combo, doing a fund-raiser but tying it to exercise," said Carl DeBrule, who rode 50 miles under the crystalline blue skies. "Everybody likes an excuse to get out on a day like today."

Kallas, a financial adviser with SmithBarney, founded the tour with Phil Murphy, an Oakland accountant, and other members of the CPA Society of New Jersey. The society also established a scholarship in Kallas' name that goes to college

accounting majors with Bergen County roots.

Murphy, 46, had ridden in a multiple sclerosis fund-raiser since his father came down with that disease. Kallas simply felt a duty to give back. They organized the first bike tour with accountants, lawyers, and bankers they knew.

The beginnings were humble. "It was a disaster," Murphy said of the first tour in 1996. "It rained, we had people get hurt."

But the band of volunteers also developed into a family, with Kallas as one of its leaders. He had a quick, dry wit that kept people relaxed and a detail-oriented mind that kept things organized.

A father of two young children, Kallas was born in Manhattan, the youngest of two brothers. His parents owned a grocery store on the Upper West Side, and had moved to Fort Lee by the time Jim was in high school.

He graduated from William Paterson University before earning a master's in finance from Pace University.

But Kallas liked to joke that he didn't fit the buttoned-down CPA stereotype, from his skydiving to his taste for jazz clubs.

"He got involved in anything he could get his hands on," Colleen Kallas said. "In all of the time we knew each other, I don't think we sat around and watched one hour of TV."

Doctors diagnosed lung cancer in October 2001 and found it had extended to his leg. At the bike tour that year, Sharma, of the Volunteer Center, noticed how tired he looked. Kallas shouldn't have had long to live, given how far the cancer had spread, his wife said. But, she added, he had "a will to live."

"After a year or two, the doctors considered him a miracle," she said. "His personality, his drive, his love of life, his love of family, gave him those years."

By last year's fund-raiser, Kallas seemed energized again. The bike tour remained one of his passions, Phil Murphy said.

"He would talk about the fact that we were helping kids with cancer, that we were helping people less fortunate than us," Murphy said. "The tour just meant to him that there are people less fortunate that are deserving of our time, our energy, our resources, and this was a wonderful way to do it."

E-mail: nussbaum@northjersey.com