

Whether it's a 10-Speed or Three-Wheeler, Dawn Petersen Loves to be in the Driver's Seat

"It's not the destination, it's the journey." That line popularized by author Ralph Waldo Emerson rings true with Vista del Monte resident Dawn Petersen, whose "journey" began almost 50 years ago on two wheels and with a dream to see the country.



Dawn enjoys riding around the Vista campus.

"In the summer of 1972 when I was in college, my boyfriend at the time, Steve, convinced me to take a cross-country trip with him on our 10-speed bikes," Dawn remembers. "I did not realize it at the time but after that trip, cycling was not just a hobby it was my passion. It was in my blood."

At the time, the 10-speed bike was relatively new to the US, having been imported from Japan in the late 1960s. It fueled the astonishing "bike boom" of the 1970s, particularly among baby boomers, like Dawn. She and Steve worked up to the cross country trip with shorter excursions like their trip from Monterey to San Diego.

Dawn and Steve began their Pacific to Atlantic ride from Portland, Oregon in July. Negotiating the northern highways, their goal was Portland, Maine. They decided to ride no more than about 50 miles a day, stopping at campgrounds (or any place they could pitch a tent) or at the occasional motel along the way, to rest.

"There were no dedicated bike trails at the time and no special accommodations for cyclists, just the open highways," Dawn said. "Our biggest challenge was protecting ourselves from sun exposure. We had a simple road map to guide us but more often than not, we traveled by the seat of our pants." At that pace, the couple arrived in Maine in 55 days.

"There is no better way to see the country than on two wheels," Dawn said. "We met so many wonderful people. I remember the beauty of Montana and North Dakota and how, about half way to Maine, we stopped and spent all day at a hot springs. That was a welcome stop. I'll tell you one thing, whether you realize it or not, cycling will get you into great shape."



Dawn reaches the Atlantic on 1970s cross country trip.

As the 1970s progressed, things changed for Dawn. She and Steve broke up after he graduated from San Jose State. She went to work for Xerox and put cycling on hold to focus on her career. Then in the late 1980s, she rediscovered cycling. However, an accident once again temporarily sidelined her when she broke her elbow and wrist.

“It was in my blood so despite the accident I still wanted more,” she said.

Despite her enthusiasm, Dawn faced yet another challenge. Due to a chronic medical condition, her eyesight was failing and she felt uncomfortable riding her 10-speed after the accident, so she purchased her first recumbent three-wheeled cycle and she was back on the road. “The three-wheeler gave me a new lease on cycling,” she said.

With that new lease, Dawn joined cycling groups, which took her to events like the *Tater TOT (Tricycles Optional Tour)* recumbent bike rally in Kellogg, Idaho where she cycled the famous Coeur d’Alene Trail. She also participated in the renowned *El Tour de Tucson*, to raise money for juvenile diabetes research and other charities.

“I was slowly getting back in shape so I decided to go for a big challenge ... another cross country ride.”

In 2011, nearly 40 years after her first coast-to-coast excursion, she traveled with a cycling group from San Diego to St. Augustine, FL.

“The second time was much different,” Dawn said. “It was much easier. I was part of a large group and everything was organized for us. But the one thing that did not change was the feeling of freedom and gliding through the air, almost soaring. It was liberating! And 40 years later, it was still the best way to see this country.”

Now living at Vista, Dawn rides her recumbent bikes (one of which is motorized) around the campus’ perimeter and often throughout the quiet streets surrounding the Santa Barbara foothills.

“The trips may be shorter now but the feeling is the same,” Dawn said.