



Westward ho—on two-wheels

By MIKE SCANLON

Eric Nichols and Todd Teachout really know how to get things rolling. Nichols just finished pedaling his way from New York to San Francisco, and from San Francisco back to Detroit. Teachout joined him on the return trip in Omaha, Nebraska, when Nichols' partner got saddlebags and went home. Nichols and Teachout, who met between \$3,000-\$4,000 in pledges for the Michigan Society for Autistic Children. Society members turned out to offer their thanks Tuesday at Vogel Center in Garden City, one of the largest state-sponsored education centers for autistic children in Michigan. Nichols was on the road from May 12 to Sept. 2. The initial plan did not include the return ride, but donations fell far short of the \$10,000 goal.

SO WHEN an anonymous San Jose, Calif., man offered another grand for the ride back, the wheels were set in motion. So to speak. Nichols got involved in the trip because of Shields, who graduated from U-M last spring and "wanted to do something big before he got into the real world." Shields placed an ad for a partner in an April Fool's Day edition of the campus newspaper. Nichols answered it, and he had his regrets afterward — but only before the trip started. "I would say the toughest part is probably psyching yourself up for leaving," said Nichols, a junior at U-M in mechanical engineering. "I was worried about trouble, I was worried about traffic." He needs a have. "Enroute, I filled 1 1/2 address books," said Nichols, who grew up in Berkeley. "The most surprising thing was how nice people were to us. I expected to get rolled once or twice or hit by a car. (But) overall I'd never met nicer people. There were a few hassles and those were in the cities. The bigger the city, the more uptight people are."

CONSIDER the south side of Chicago, the legendary south side of Chicago, through which the duo passed on their return. "We just kept pedaling," said Nichols, 23. "Kind of fast." Teachout, 21, has won state titles in bike racing three times. He was, perhaps, a touch blasé about the whole experience. "For six years I've racing bicycles, so this is no problem. It's kind of routine. "But I'd never gone day after day after day." Things didn't always go smoothly. "Without a doubt, as far as hard rides, the desert took the cake all the way. The mountains were actually fairly pleasant, cool. We used to call them half and half mountains — half a day to get up and half an hour to get down," said Nichols. The pair stayed in churches, jails, fraternities, sororities and fire houses on the trip. "We stopped at one fire station and the firemen — they didn't even look like firemen, they weren't shaved and they were wearing these greasy clothes — they were throwing firecrackers around. Some guy would go to the john and another guy would toss in a firecracker," said Nichols. "We were figuring it would be kind of funny if they burned down the station." When Nichols and Teachout needed a knife to cut a pound cake, several were preferred simultaneously by these firefighters. "About six guys flicked out switchblades," said Nichols. On the first day of the trip, Nichols and Shields totaled 35 miles. On the last day, Nichols and Teachout ripped through 116 miles, but that fell short of the trip record of 145 miles in a day. NICHOLS' FAVORITE place on the trip was probably Salinas, Kansas. The whole of state of Kansas is remembered fondly, but the pair took a week off and settled in Salinas for a stay. Shields ended up getting a job in California. Nichols picked up a Los Angeles man as a partner, but he dropped out with three saddlebags and Teachout caught a ride to Omaha to meet up with Nichols.

New bridge aid sought

Five bridges in south Oakland County may be replaced if the Oakland County Road Commission receives the federal funding it's seeking. The bridges — in Troy, Southfield, Bloomfield Township and Beverly Hills — have deteriorated because "they're old," according to Demmis Pajot, a road commission spokesman. "Most of them were built in the 1920's," Pajot said. The bridges have posted load restrictions. They are "safe if used as posted," said Pajot. The road commission has requested \$2 million to reconstruct 11 bridges and approaches throughout the county. The road commission maintains a total of 85 bridges. The south county bridges are: Ten Mile Road over Pebble Creek, east of Inkster Road, Southfield. The Lahser bridge in Beverly Hills carries the largest repair price tag, \$390,000.

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