

Steve Susman: Back on the Bike for Charity

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Steve Susman didn't like being told "no." And the more the Susman Godfrey founding partner heard why he could-not-should-not ride a bicycle from Houston to Austin, the more determined the then 69-year-old became to ride in the event benefiting the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. That was three years ago. This past weekend, Susman not only completed his fourth annual "BP MS 150," but the litigator wore the coveted yellow jersey bearing the number "1" and marking him as the top fundraiser among more than 13,000 riders.



Steve Susman at finish line of 'BP MS 150'

And he's likely to be wearing the number "1" jersey next year, when the incoming monies are tallied at the end of May. Susman raised \$113,000 last year. His goal this year: \$150,000. As of Monday, he had raised more than \$124,000. Susman's participation also represented the first time in almost a decade that the top fundraiser actually rode in the race.

"I believe in giving the same level of commitment, whether it's in the courtroom or in my philanthropy," Susman says. He likened his weekend ride to "being the band leader in a very long parade."

Susman's fundraising efforts, however, are only part of the story. The Susman Godfrey cycling team, "Swift Justice," included 37 riders representing attorneys from the firm's offices in

Houston, Dallas, New York and Seattle, in addition to legal colleagues, family members and friends. Currently, the team is approaching its goal of raising \$225,000 for this year's event. The MS Society's overall goal for the 2013 event is \$18 million.

"Training for and riding nearly 180 miles improves the health of my colleagues and certainly extends my life," Susman says. "In the process, we are helping to wipe out a horrible disease. Our friends and clients have been so wonderful in supporting us."

Attorney Trey Peacock, the Susman Godfrey team captain, first rode eight years ago. Like many riders who cycle in honor of someone with MS, Peacock rides for Rachel Daley, the sister-in-law of Susman Godfrey partner Brooke Taylor. Peacock, too, wears one of the 300 numbered, yellow jerseys heralding top fundraisers.

Daley is a nutrition educator and organic farmer in Vermont, who was diagnosed with MS several years ago. Peacock says the effort she spends to confront and fight MS, a progressive neurological disorder, is "far greater than the effort required to make this bike ride across Texas. It's something I do gladly."

Peacock explains that the bicycle riders have a tradition, when passing a rider wearing a yellow jersey, to say "thank you" to that rider for his or her fundraising effort.



Steve Susman (second from left) with his bicycle riding partner and former client Terry Casey and his two stepdaughters, Amanda and Whitney Fox

This year's ride started on the outskirts of Houston on Saturday and finished in downtown Austin, near the State Capitol, on Sunday. The cyclists spent Saturday night at the Fayette County Campgrounds in La Grange.

As the event evolved into a firm-wide cause, the resulting stories and fundraising successes spurred Susman to action. Despite the fact his participation was discouraged by well-meaning

naysayers, he purchased a road bike at a New York City shop and hired a trainer who took him to Central Park.

Susman, who splits his time between the Houston and New York offices, remembers that, among the challenges of the training sessions, was the Big Apple's 30-degree ("or less," Susman says) weather. Susman notes that riders are on their bikes for as many as nine hours in a day. "The main thing you train is your butt," he comments with a laugh.



The Susman Godfrey 'Swift Justice' team members: Trey Peacock, Cory Buland, Terry Oxford, Jonathan Ross, Daniel Charest, Jordan Connors, Matthew Behncke and Chanler Langham

A marathon runner until a hip replacement a decade ago, Susman discovered that bicycling is a good sporting substitute. He also found it to be a bonding experience with colleagues and family members. This year, his son, daughter and two stepdaughters rode with him.

"Having my four kids riding alongside me gave me tenacity," he says.

And next year? Grandson Nicholas Kuhn becomes 14 – the minimum age for riders – and is counting on granddad to ride with him.

Donations to teams and individual riders will continue to be accepted through May. Visit <http://v.gd/nwaIFN> to donate.

Do you have a special avocation, hobby or other lifestyle interest to share? Please email patricia.baldwin@texaslawbook.net.

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