

EL TOUR *Stories* 2015



Giffords and Kelly Ride the Sanofi 40-Mile El Tour

by Kate Holder

The conditions on El Tour Ride Day were ideal – a cloudless

sky with slight breezes and afternoon temperatures nearing 80. A perfect day for former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords to accomplish yet another perfectly improbable milestone: completing the Tucson Medical Center El Tour de Tucson presented by Casino Del Sol Resort Sanofi 40-mile ride with her husband, Capt. Mark Kelly.

The 40-mile event started in front of the Sanofi office in Oro Valley. An American flag fluttered from Gabby's retrofitted recumbent bike as she and Mark – on his own specialized bike – rode with a group of about a dozen friends and supporters. Along the route, spectators and fellow bicyclists called out words of encouragement:

"Go Gabby!"

"Looking good, Gabby"

"Great to see you!"

Bicycling has played a role in Gabby's rehabilitation.

"My recovery has been full of milestones both big and small," Gabby said in a statement to The Associated Press, "and a big one was getting back on my bike and back to riding around this gorgeous city of ours with friends and family."

At El Tour's Dedication Dinner held four days before the ride, Mark told the sold-out gathering:

"Last year, we did the 11-mile (Fun Ride). And the first thing Gabby said when we finished was, '40 miles.'"

Thus the 40-mile El Tour event became the goal this year. After training

for months, Gabby sent out a tweet the day before Ride Day that said: "Training's done. Bike's ready. @iamspecialized gear is laid out. I'm ready to tackle 40 miles in @tourdetucson!"

Ride Day unfolded with an assist from Mother Nature, bestowing weather that produced sub-four-hour record times in the 104-mile event. There was either no wind or a tail wind, especially helpful when riding south along the I-10 frontage road where headwinds tend to gust in the afternoon.

Shortly before their finish, a motorcycle police officer told Gabby and Mark's group that the police had something special planned. As the bicyclists made the final turn onto 6th Avenue in downtown Tucson, Gabby and Mark were singled out and escorted to the finish line by about five motorcycle cops.

As visually impressive as Gabby and Mark's finish was, the fact that Gabby's bike tipped the scales at around 65 pounds made her four-hour and 35-minute finishing time all the more remarkable.

"It was the longest Gabby and I have ridden," Mark said after, "but she did



Former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords Capt. Mark Kelly and a group pedaling their way to the finish line. *Damion Alexander Photo*

great. It was a great ride and the weather was perfect."

It was the perfect ending to what was a great week for El Tour. Just days before, Gabby and Mark were honored as the ride's Dedication Recipients. Every year, El Tour is dedicated to one or more individuals who have "demonstrated great accomplishments while overcoming adversity," a gross understatement when describing these two. Mark is a retired naval aviator and NASA astronaut who had flown combat missions during the Gulf War and, later, space shuttle missions as both a pilot and commander.

When she married Mark in November 2007, Gabby was serving her

first term as a member of the United States House of Representatives for Arizona's 8th Congressional District. At the time, she was only the third Arizona woman ever elected to Congress. Gabby was a rising political star and just a week into her third term when she was shot in the head during an assassination attempt on Jan. 8, 2011 in Tucson.

Surviving such a grievous attack would be accomplishment enough for most people, but Gabby, like Mark, have higher sightlines than most. ✍

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Accomplishing The 75

by Steven Fowler

Accomplishing the 75-mile

bike ride in Tucson Medical Center 33rd El Tour de Tucson presented by Casino del Sol Resort was a memorable milestone for 42-year-old amputee Edward McCarty, who was there to inspire not just himself but others, too.

McCarty finished the 75-mile route of El Tour in eight hours, 34.34.38 minutes.

"Even when I hit that finish line, there were people that came up to me and said 'You know what? You inspired us,'" McCarty said.

How he got to the event is also inspiring.

On April 4, 2008, McCarty, a Tucsonan, was involved in a life-threatening situation when he lost his right leg in a car accident, which led McCarty to slip into a coma for three months. He underwent several surgeries, including seven on one side of his body for revisions and to repair severe nerve damage.

"I was waiting at a bus stop for the bus to go home when a guy and girl were arguing down the street. The girl got out of the car and started walking towards the bus stop but the guy would

pull out into traffic to cut her and cut her off yelling at her," McCarty said. "The guy kept cutting her off. He eventually hit me into a wall and in backing up (he) ran me over again."

"My foot got stuck into the car's axle and it was torn off," he continued.

Roughly a week shy of this year's El Tour, Hanger Inc., a clinic that provides prophetic services that enhance human physical ability to those who are in need, called McCarty about riding in the 75-mile event. With little hesitation, he told Hanger he would do it. He felt it was an opportunity of a lifetime.

"There is nothing I can't do if I put my mind to it," McCarty said.

After all, he knows his limitations given he's an athlete. Although he had just 10 days to prepare for the event, McCarty was determined to ride but knew he needed to increase his workouts to prepare for the El Tour challenge.

However, McCarty had never ridden a bicycle with his prosthetic leg. In fact, the last time he rode a bike was at the age of 20. Still, that was not going to stop him.

"I had a week and three days to ride around town to get my momentum up

and build up my legs to get used to the bicycle," McCarty said. "Hanger provided the bicycle, the jersey and everything I needed for the event."

To prepare, McCarty trained half the day while going to places where he volunteered to help other amputees. At night, he trained an additional 10-to-12 miles.

"I've been trying to get my life back together, but I've never had the opportunity to participate and do things like I am now," McCarty said.

When it comes to volunteering, McCarty is an empowerment visitor where he visits new amputees to discuss their new lifestyle in hopes of getting them to think positively.

McCarty said that the most he rode in one day was 20 miles. By the time El Tour started, he had reached 70.

"All the way through the tour, they [the riders] were inspired just for the fact that I was riding with a prosthetic leg," he said. "Hundreds upon hundreds of people that passed me said that I was their inspiration."

With his first career El Tour behind him, he has his eyes set on riding again next year.



Ceser Nemer and Edward McCarty at El Tour start/finish line. *Photo Courtesy Ceser Nemer*

"I want other people to see that we're not just handicapped, we're not crippled, there's nothing we can't do if we put our minds to it," McCarty said. "Watch out, here I come." ✍