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Morris Twp. Septuagenarian Bicycles 1,500 Miles

By Henry M. Holden

Seventy-year old Morris Township resident Paul Kiczek recently retired but not to a rocking chair. Kiczek said that he had planned an adventure to coincide his retirement. The adventure was no small undertaking: He planned to bicycle ride 1,500 miles from Key West, Fla., to his home in Morristown.

"I thought it would be adventurous and test me physically and mentally, and was I was up for the challenge," said Kiczek, who had been a cyclist for more than two decades.

"I researched the bike that I was going to use carefully," he said. "I wound up selecting a cycling bike which was more durable than the ordinary bike and close to a mountain bike.

"I had it custom-built with racks and fenders and bags that allowed me to carry about 40 pounds equipment."

The plan was to partner with his friend Tom Landes, who had more experience on multi-day bike rides. Landes, also in his age bracket, had experienced a similar trip about five years ago, by himself.

"I learned a lot from him because he had made the trip and he volunteered to join me.

"We started from Fort Lauderdale on April 10 and I arrived back in Morristown on May 10. We used Google maps since there was a bicycle option which gave us



Kiczek's family joined him on the final leg of his month-long trek. His five grandchildren joined him for the last quarter-mile which he says was a such a rewarding experience.

our preferred coastline route.

"However, a psychological issue arose in me when Tom dropped out after a week to go home and deal with some issues," he said.

The solo part was one that Kiczek hadn't considered. "It was a good personal experience being out on my own, and I valued the relationships I built with people along the way."

Among the obstacles Kiczek had to overcome were unexpected repairs including the first in Key Largo, Fla., where he blew a tire. Kiczek said he planned for breakdowns.

"The very first day I broke down pretty badly near Biscayne Bay natural preserve," he said. "I had checked Google and select-

ed a route that was not a preferred route but one I thought would be OK. The road was filled with stones and I wound up getting a flat tire that I couldn't fix. I was able to walk out of the preserve, but I still had a flat. I had to call Uber."

Uber worked out. He was able to get to a bicycle shop where he dumped the tires he had and bought better ones.

"Another challenge I had was in Key West," he continued. "They are notorious for having a 7-mile Bridge build for cars, not bicycles. It had a 3-foot strip for the shoulder. It's a very dangerous bridge for a bicyclist with one lane and cars and trucks zooming by at 70 miles an hour.

"Bridges became my nemesis," he said.

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Septuagenarian Bicycles...

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"I was taking a coastal route with dozens of bridges up and down the coast. Most of them were not built for bicycles with a little or no shoulders.

"At times I took Route 17 which was not really an interstate," he said. "The challenge I had was Route 17 was not the same highway from state

to state. In some places it had narrow or no shoulders, in other places they were wider.

I ended up totaling about 1,600 miles, and I averaged about 60 miles a day. I would start out early in the morning, just after dawn, and ride until about 2 p.m. It was just a wonderful lifetime experience for me."