

Buford residents set stage to sparkle for cyclists

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 04/18/07

In the northwest part of Gwinnett, they're calling it the Tour de Buford.

City residents are planning events, festivities and entertainment to celebrate the throng of Tour de Georgia cyclists they expect to rush through midday on Saturday.

"We don't know if we'll get 2,000 people or 20,000," said Tim Koenning, president of the Buford Business Alliance. The group is marketing events in Buford and coordinating logistical support with the city.

"However many people we get, we want the world to know we can shine bright here in Buford," Koenning said. "I hope people think we've done a bang-up job."

Stage 6 of the bicycle race begins at noon at Lake Lanier Islands, with cyclists sprinting to the Bona Allen Mansion on Main Street, winding through downtown and heading up Hamilton Mill Road.

But things will crank up in downtown Buford much earlier. To stake out the best viewing spot — probably at the corner of Scott and East Main — and to get the most convenient parking, plan to arrive by 10 a.m. Volunteers will direct viewers to parking.

From 10:30 to 11:15 a.m., Village Events will sponsor a "drumming and grooving" session at the amphitheater near the Bona Allen Mansion on Main Street.

People from across Gwinnett will gather and start drumming and dancing, and some will bring extra instruments for those who want to join the throng. After the drummers finish, the Buford High School jazz band will play from 11:30 until noon.

Face painters and food vendors, such as Honey Baked Ham and Chick-fil-A, will occupy space in the grassy area near the mansion.

"If it's nice outside, we're going to be grilling out near the amphitheater," said Chris Hope, owner of Sperata and Picasso on East Main in Buford.

His restaurants will be open, so the hungry can buy food inside or out, he said.

"We're expecting to be busy, but I really don't know what to expect," said Karess Trudeau, manager of Aqua Terra, an East Main restaurant. "I'm hoping for the best."

Downtown businesses all along Main Street will be open. In the square on Scott Street, Mama's Board-n-Bike will stage a BMX stunt show from 11:15 to noon. There will be bike gear vendors and manufacturers with touring bikes and trick bikes available, Koenning said.

At noon, the drummers — who could number as many as 50 people — will position themselves on both sides of Main Street near the sprint finish line. They will beat out a rhythm and "work up everyone," as the riders fly by, Koenning said.

Waterfront at Lanier Harbor is giving \$2,000 as a cash prize to the winner of the sprint. Riders can reach 45 mph "so that will be pretty exciting," Koenning said. A banner hanging across Main Street near the Bona Allen Mansion will mark the end of the sprint.

Koenning said it would be difficult to estimate the economic impact the Tour de Georgia might have on Buford, but he thinks the exposure for the city will be invaluable.

After they leave Buford, the cyclists will wind through Barrow, Walton, Rockdale, a bit of south Gwinnett and DeKalb, ending at Stone Mountain Park at a few minutes after 4 p.m.

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