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Tour de Georgia to roll through Buford

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BUFORD - If you aren't too sure what the Tour de Georgia will bring when it rolls through Gwinnett on Saturday, it's OK. You're not alone.

"It's something I was not very familiar with either until I got involved with a lot of the planning," said Tim Koenning, president of the Buford Business Alliance.

The five-year-old professional bike race - billed as "America's premier cycling event" - will be going through Buford for the first time and the city is doing all it can to make the day an event, not just 10-15 minutes of watching cyclists ride by.

Festivities will begin at 10 a.m. in Historic Buford and bikers are expected to come through the city starting at 12:15 p.m.

Drum & Dance in Gwinnett will hold its monthly gathering Saturday in conjunction with the Tour coming through Buford. The group will organize a drum and dance circle in downtown from 10:30 a.m. to noon.

Spectators are invited to watch and participate, but people are being asked to bring extra drums.

There will also be a BMX-bicycle trick show put on by Mama's Board-n-Bike. Chuck Smillie, co-owner of the Buford bike shop, said one of his employees is also a professional BMX rider and has helped organize the show, which will begin at 11:30 a.m.

Mama's Board-n-Bike moved to Main Street Buford from Suwanee a little over a year ago and Smillie was excited about the Tour de Georgia coming to town.

"To find out it was coming right by our shop was a wonderful piece of news," Smillie said.

The route for the 2007 Tour de Georgia was announced Jan. 29 and Koenning said Buford has been doing all it can to create an exciting day for spectators.

"We're trying to create a festival ambience," Koenning said. "We're hoping to make it an exciting event and a special day for Buford."

The race will begin at Lake Lanier Islands about noon, move through downtown Buford at approximately 12:15 p.m., then go through Barrow, Walton, Newton, Rockdale and DeKalb counties before finishing up Stone Mountain Park. The route is 113.7 miles long.

Like Buford, Stone Mountain Park is hoping to create a special atmosphere for the event.

The park will host a Live Healthy Georgia Expo that will start at 1 p.m. in the special events meadow. The expo will have interactive exhibits and children's activities aimed at encouraging health.

Guests will also be able to view the final two hours of the race on giant televisions in the expo area.

Bikers are expected to enter the Stone Mountain Park at the west gate between 3:40 and 4:20 p.m.

After two laps around the park, bikers are expected to finish around 4:10 to 4:50 p.m. The finish line is located on Old Hugh Howell Road near the special events meadow.

Stone Mountain will also have its laser show at 8:30 p.m.

Both places are hoping for large crowds, but neither really have a great idea of what to expect.

Koenning said there's potential for a big turnout in Buford for a couple of reasons.

First, Saturday's Stage 6 will feature a 102-mile sprint through Buford where riders will be going at speeds of up to 46 miles per hour. The sprint will end on Main Street near the historic Bona Allen Mansion and the winner will receive extra points for the entire tour and a cash prize. Drum & Dance in Gwinnett plans to organize a "rumble gauntlet" near the sprint's finish line.

Secondly, Stage 6 will be the only Saturday stage on the 2007 Tour de Georgia and will allow cycling enthusiasts who might have to work during the week to come to Buford and enjoy the race.

"We think all of these factors could bring heavy crowds," Koenning said. "And hopefully we're prepared for heavy crowds."

Koenning said it's important for people to arrive early, with crowds expected to build rapidly.

There will be volunteers to help direct people to parking, which Buford expects there to be plenty of.

Stone Mountain Park spokeswoman Christine Parker also said it will be best to arrive at the park early as road closures could create more traffic as the day goes on.

If You Go

Watching the race in downtown Buford

- **When:** Events start at 10 a.m. and bikers are expected to pass through at approximately 12:15 p.m.
- **Best Spots to Watch:** Along Main Street. The sprint finish line will be next to the Bona Allen Mansion.
- **Events:** BMX bike trick show and a drum circle

Watching the race at Stone Mountain Park

- **When:** Events start at 1 p.m. and bikers are expected to enter the park between 3:40 and 4:20 p.m.
- **Best Spots to Watch:** The race finish will be at Old Hugh Howell Road near the special events meadow. Bikers will make two laps around the park.
- **Events:** The Live Healthy Georgia Expo, which will include the final two hours of the race being shown on giant televisions.

On the Web

For a full schedule of where the race will go and when it will be there, check www.tourdegeorgia.com.