

## Ultra-athlete George Hood's record destination part of a bigger journey

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From Monday: George Hood endured the road of trials and is heading toward his goal of breaking the Guinness world record for longest stationary bike marathon. After fighting through sleep deprivation that produced hallucinations, Hood approaches the mark. It's just past 4 a.m., almost an hour before the Fry Family YMCA is open for business on Monday, May 12. The sky is still black, but the back corner studio is already pumping with life.

Music blares - "Daydream Believer" by the Monkees is playing right now - as people sing along. Seven riders work out on spin bikes in front of the stage holding George Hood and the Lemond RevMaster he's been riding for more than 174 hours. He's got about another hour to go to break the Guinness world record.

At 4:45 a.m., Hood's three sons, Christopher, Brandon and Andrew, enter the back door. Hood's legs pump a bit faster as he sees them coming toward the stage.

### FOR THE RECORD

Sun staff writer Paul LaTour takes a look at what makes endurance exercise-bike rider George Hood push himself to extremes in a three-part series. If you missed either of the first two parts, visit [napersun.com/sports](http://napersun.com/sports).

Sunday: Part 1 Monday: Part 2 Today: Part 3

An hour later it's official - Guinness adjudicator Danny Girton Jr. joins the crowded stage. He holds a framed certificate. Hood, the ex-Marine and retired Drug Enforcement Administration special agent, raises his arms. He holds up the certificate and smiles. His legs keep pumping.

They do so for another hour. His ride ends 177 hours, 45 minutes after it started, nearly two full hours beyond the old mark.

Return to the ordinary world

Ten days later Hood sits inside a classroom at the Waubonsie Valley gold campus, a guest of special-education teacher Brian Grider and his teaching assistant Alena Edwards.

The two found themselves in Hood's inner circle at the event. Grider often rode a spin bike next to Hood, while Edwards did everything from offering encouragement to keeping Hood on his 12 mph required pace.

Hood wears dark pants and a dark polo shirt with a Guinness World Record logo on the left breast as he addresses the handful of students.

He talks to them about his life as a DEA agent, and how he had to think of himself first in order to survive. He talks about how that lifestyle contributed to his divorce and shortchanged his sons. He talks about why he pushes himself beyond the normal bounds of physical endurance.

"Maybe for me, at 50 years of age, maybe it's about time I started doing the right thing," he says. "I probably should have been doing this type of thing earlier in my life. At one point in my life it was all about me. I paid a price for that personally and professionally.

"I can (now) look at myself in the mirror every morning. And I'm not perfect. But I know one thing for certain - I can ride a stationary bike longer than any other person in the world right now."

The spotlight has turned away from Hood. The Ride George Ride team has broken up. For the most part, Hood is left to himself, save for the dachshund puppy, Chips, he got in February.

"I feel totally alone, like I'm in this vacuum," Hood had said at his Aurora townhouse a week earlier. "That's an adjustment."

## Application of the goal

Eight weeks have passed and Hood sits at the Fox Restaurant on Ogden Avenue in Aurora. Over an asparagus omelet, he says heroes are people like Neil Armstrong. They aren't guys who ride stationary bikes.

"I'm humbled by that label, but it's more about setting the right example," Hood says. "I always wonder if I'm a hero to my kids. I don't care what anybody else thinks. I wonder what my kids think of their dad."

But there are others who do call him a hero, people such as Donna Marquez. She met Hood during his first assault on the spin record, back in January 2007. That event raised more than \$30,000 for Concerns of Police Survivors, a group that benefits the families of police killed in the line of duty.

"What he did to honor our loved ones, we've never seen that kind of sacrifice," said Marquez, whose brother was a Chicago police officer killed in 2002. "He is our hero because who does something like that for you? The kids call him Superman, but we just call him Super George."

In his next two events, Hood raised more than \$65,000 for charity, including more than \$30,000 for the YMCA's annual Strong Kids Campaign.

It is Hood's trilogy - three attempts at getting his name in the Guinness Book of World Records. He's still awaiting word on that. Guinness chooses only about 10 percent of the 40,000 records for the annual publication.

"For his sake, physically he needs to put it behind him," said Paul Oggerino, a DEA agent who worked under Hood. "But people like him need to have people, they need to know what's next. That's his personality. He needs to have that fuel."

Hood jokes about future attempts. Like an event held in the Los Angeles Coliseum to benefit world peace where Ride George Ride would bring together world leaders. Or putting the bike on the back of a truck and touring the countryside, a pleasant thought to somebody who racked up more than 2,000 miles in May without ever leaving the YMCA.

He smiles at the thought of such fantastical ideas. The smile fades when he says he wants to push the 200-hour mark.

"I'd like to see how far I can go," he says. "I don't know how much more a body can handle."

Perhaps Hood still seeks a piece of validation that seems missing from his life. Perhaps he believes his legacy will be lost if his name isn't recorded in a book.

Or perhaps he just can't see the hero so many others see in him.