



***How many years have you been riding in the Bike-a-thon?  
Have you wondered how it got its start?***

Recently, we had the good fortune of being able to sit down with Dominic S. Liberi, Esquire, a native South Philadelphian who, 46 years ago, was a new employee with the American Cancer Society in Philadelphia and assigned the task of putting together a new fundraising bike ride. Liberi, along with two other Philadelphians serving as local ACS volunteers, formulated and put out, what is today, the single largest one day endurance fundraising event that the American Cancer Society hosts, having raised more than \$25 million in its history. Liberi, now an attorney and partner at the law firm of Obermayer Rebmann Maxwell & Hoppel LLP, continues to cheer on the work of the Bike-a-thon.

**American Cancer Society:** How did you come up with the idea of a bike ride to raise money for ACS?

**Dominic Liberi:** At the time, the American Cancer Society was hosting a number of small bike rides across the country in local communities raising funds to fight cancer. At the Philadelphia office, we received a request from the national headquarters of ACS to implement bike events as fundraisers throughout the Philadelphia area. At that time they were all called bike-a-thons.

**ACS:** Where was the end point for the first ride?

**DL:** Well we began the ride at the foot of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge and ended at Boardwalk and Park Place in Atlantic City and were greeted by local officials, including the mayor. Originally we thought about having the Bike-a-thon around the inside of Roosevelt Park in South Philadelphia, near where our sports' stadiums are now located, but the first chairman of the bike event, the late Len Lobiando, strongly suggested that we put together a ride for the 62 miles to Atlantic City. He had once done that with his **Boy Scout** group years before. Len, an avid biker, was referred to me by the late Joseph Gerace, the owner of Gerace's Bike Shop in South Philadelphia. It turned out, that both Len Lobiando and Joe Gerace, spent a number of years engaged in the Bike-a-thon as volunteers and also organized the South Philadelphia



unit of the American Cancer Society involving more volunteers and fund raising events, topped off by an annual Humanitarian Dinner with special cup engraved with the award winner's name each year. Len Lobiando was the first recipient in 1974. Actually, I am delivering the Humanitarian Cup over to the ACS and the Bike-a-thon Committee for its archives and have brought it with me today.

**ACS:** Did you experience any problems?

**DL:** We had several vehicles driving back and forth along the route assisting riders and a couple of dozen volunteers providing SAG support, rider transport and to supply refreshments at various rest stops along the way. Everybody arrived safely and were quite happy with the event. Everything went letter perfect in the first year. However, in the second year we had a near miss situation, which could've become quite a mess for many of the cyclists. We hired buses to return the riders, as we had in the past year, who needed a ride back to Philadelphia and we had several individuals who had truck support to transport the bikes back to Philadelphia. In the second year of the event, one of the trucks never arrived. Many riders were stranded, waiting for their bikes. We learned the driver sold all the bikes. Fortunately, we discovered this quickly and were able to retrieve most of the bikes and of course the other bikers were reimbursed for their loss. Of course, that truck driver was not asked back the following year.



**ACS:** What are your thoughts, now that so many years have passed and the event is still being conducted?

**DL:** To think that this event has had such longevity and so many riders over the years is just amazing. It is gratifying to know that something I worked on in my very first year with ACS has grown so tremendously thanks to the wonderful volunteers that put so much time and effort into it. And, quite frankly, I am blown away by the many millions of dollars raised to fight cancer. I have the pleasure of knowing a number of people who today are actively involved in the Bike-a-thon, continuing its legacy, one of whom is a great partner of mine at Obermayer, Michael Vagnoni, and of course the chairman of the event, Mark Feinman, is a very dear friend and law school classmate. I see the Bike-a-thon now as a Philadelphia institution and just proud to play a small role in getting it all going.