

News

Awareness tour celebrates homecoming



CARA BRADY
Morning Star Staff

Michael Schratte stopped his bike outside the Canadian Mental Health Association

office with a big smile for his supporters Thursday, some of them local cyclists who had biked with him from Okanagan College's

Kalamalka campus.

"I've been dreaming of this day for a long time," he said.

It was not only one more day on his more than a year-long journey around the world to shatter the stigma surrounding mental illness, it was a homecoming. Schratte grew up in and attended school in Vernon. He has bipolar disorder and has learned how to live with it. He wants others to know that mental illness is only one part of a person's life and he has gone on to be a teacher and journalist.

Schratte, who began the trip in August 2010, paying all his own expenses, was quick to point out that while the issue of mental illness is important, he does not want any special recognition.

"I'm just the dog and pony show. It's time we start looking after the vulnerable people in our society with empathy and compassion and remove the stigma," he said.

"Hollywood and the media have made mental illness scary but the truth is that less than 17 per cent of violent crime is committed by people with mental illness. What scares me is, who are the other 83 per cent?"

He added his concern that 10 Canadians die by suicide every day, many of them men who don't know how to reach out for help.



CARA BRADY/MORNING STAR

Michael Schratte visits with his mother Margit during a stop in Vernon Thursday.

"One in five Canadians has some kind of a mental illness in their lifetime. All of us have known someone with mental illness at one time or other," said Schratte.

"The ugly portrayal of mental illness will never go away until we say it's OK to have a mental illness. If the stigma doesn't go away, we won't be able to treat it. People should feel as open about talking about mental illness as they do talking about a physical illness. If we start believing that, I think it will be all right."

Sandy Rysen, executive director, CMHA Vernon Branch, was delighted to see more than 100 people, including some Vernon Vipers

players, come out to show their support for Schratte's ride.

"We were overwhelmed with the response, and so was Michael. It was wonderful, it was great to see that support," she said.

"He believes so strongly that we need to get rid of the stigma, and so do we. How can people heal from illness if no one will talk about it? If you have a physical illness, there is always support and encouragement. We need to raise awareness and get rid of the stigma."

All the money raised from the Vernon reception for Schratte, which had a barbecue by donation, will stay with the Vernon branch for mental health programs for children and

youth.

Schratte completed 36,000 kilometres of the trip that took him to six continents with his arrival in Vernon.

He continues Ride Don't Hide, a fundraiser for the Canadian Mental Health Association of B.C. for another 4,000 kilometres around British Columbia, scheduled to arrive at his starting place in Vancouver Nov. 12. Then he'll take some time to rest before he's back in the classroom in January.

Schratte feels the trip has been a success in raising awareness but it also has another happy ending. His girlfriend, Deborah So, joined him for part of the ride in Asia and they got engaged in Hong Kong.

For more information and Schratte's blog and photos, or to make a donation, see www.ridedonthide.com.

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Life

Time to bring it out in the open

Imagine riding 40,000 km on your bicycle across Canada, through Central and South America over to Thailand, Vietnam to China, through Europe and across Canada, and numerous places in between.

The physical and emotional strength this must take is incredible to me. And to do it to bring attention to mental health — Michael Schratte is amazing. His Ride Don't Hide world campaign is raising funds for mental health. The purpose of this incredible feat is

to bring attention and awareness to the stigma around mental illness.

"Mental illness is not a weakness of character it is a disease. And with most things that



can make you sick, a bit of education, treatment and empathy can go a long way in making a person better. Isn't it about time our society was healthy

enough to allow people afflicted with a mental illness to heal? Isn't it about time we stopped being accomplices in suffering?" This is quoted from an article Michael wrote for 24 hours where he is a

contributing writer in addition to being a Grade 5 school teacher in Vancouver.

What a role model he is for his students, a hero for young and old, a person to admire and to appreciate for their accomplishments and their messages of hope.

Michael grew up in Vernon. He is hoping to raise \$100,000 for the Canadian Mental Health Association. You can donate online at www.ridedonthide.com

Depression, mental illness, suicide: we need to talk about it openly. Michael has a column, *Silence is Dangerous*, and I quote, "One of the main enduring stigmas about mental illness, particularly for men, is that it is a sign of weak-

ness. From an early age boys are socialized to be tough, to not cry. They internalize their pain and repress their feelings and fears. This silence can be fatal."

Let us not bury our heads in the sand or turn the other way when we see someone we care about suffering. Talk to them, get information, seek help. As parents we need to raise our sons and daughters to express their feelings, to allow them to ask questions, communicate openly and be wholly human. And at the same time as we do this for our children, we need to do this for ourselves, as mothers and fathers our own mental health and whole health is important.

Thank you, Michael, you have made a difference for men and women around the world, people are going to pay more attention, ask for help, receive education, and many will walk taller.

Thank you for riding, not hiding.



This Week's Bible Study Session:

True Bible Teaching About Saints

Come hear what the Bible has to say every **Wednesday** evening at 7:30pm at the **Coldstream Women's Institute Hall** 9906 Kalamalka Road, Coldstream (across from Coldstream Elementary School)

Presented by the Okanagan Christadelphians

One woman's story of struggle and hope

SHARON DURANT

Special to The Morning Star

Joan experienced severe depression over two years. She knew something was wrong. Her life had changed from being a happy-go-lucky person who loved shopping and socializing to someone who didn't want to answer the phone, go out or have anyone over.

"It creeps up on you but by the time it was most severe I couldn't even get up off the couch to go outside, it felt like I was in a dark hole with no way out," she said.

It was two years before she made supper again. Joan felt as though there was no support, partly due to the isolation. The exception was her husband and daughter who helped get her through many days. Joan said it was huge having her daughter understand what she was going through and pushing her to get help.

There was one thing that Joan managed to do throughout those two years and that was to attend Toastmasters. She's not sure what made her go, perhaps it validated her as a person; she would win ribbons and that would lift her up for a while. She remembers having to talk for one of the spontaneous Table Talks and spoke about depression

giving a toast to "those who suffer in silence."

From the encouragement of her daughter and desperately needing to make a change, Joan sought help. It was that help where she was able to talk about things that she didn't even know were bothering her.

Initially it was Joan's family physician that referred her to mental health. Joan began attending the 10-week day program, seeing a counselor and a psychiatrist. In conjunc-

tion with therapy, Joan is on medication for her depression. More recently she attended an assertiveness course at the Family Resource Centre. It was about six months into this that she began to feel that she could start to function again although she quickly adds "I still have those days, but now I have strategies from all that support I received."

"People should say that they need help."

Women are about twice as likely as men

to experience depression. The effects of stress, violence, poverty, inequality, and low self-esteem likely increase women's vulnerability to depression.

If you are concerned that you may be depressed, ask for help. Talk to your doctor or visit a walk-in clinic and tell them how you are feeling. Call the Crisis Line at 250-545-2339, they will listen and provide you with contact information where you can get help.

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Keynote Speaker: Dr. Rose Backman 1 - 3 pm	Cost: \$34.95 per person \$44.95 at the door
Mingle and shop 3- 4 pm	Where: Best Western Lodge 3914 - 32 St, Vernon, BC

Pre-registration is required - Call Jean now!

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or email: mjeankoenig_99@yahoo.com