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Wetzel County bicyclists take part in Pittsburgh's Dirty Dozen.

By Rick Steelhammer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Excess Thanksgiving dinner calories should be a thing of the past by the end of the day Saturday for a trio of Wetzel County bicyclists taking part in one of the nation's most grueling and most scenic urban hill races -- Pittsburgh's Dirty Dozen.

Among the 300 or so cyclists expected to take part in the race are New Martinsville residents Wayne Anderson, owner of Liza Street Bicycles, retired teacher John Yevuta, and former New Martinsville resident Eliot Rogers, who now lives in Pittsburgh. Their unofficial team



Courtesy photo

New Martinsville resident Wayne Anderson heads downhill during this year's Snowshoe Mountain Challenge. Anderson and two friends, Eliot Rogers and John Yevuta, are riding in the Dirty Dozen urban bicycle race in Pittsburgh this weekend.

name for the Pittsburgh race is the Rough Riders of Wetzel.

The Dirty Dozen race dates back to 1983, when Pittsburgh cyclists Danny Chew, brother Tom Chew and family friend Bob Gottlieb came up with a course that showcased their hometown's steepest and toughest climbs in one ride. All of the hills lie within 10 kilometers of downtown

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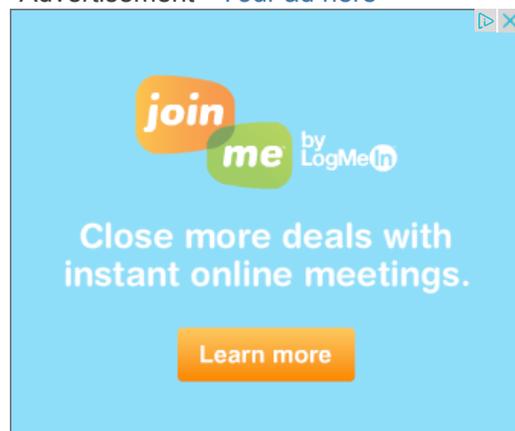
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Despite its name, the race includes 13 hill climbs, including an ascent up the 37 percent grade of cobblestone-surfaced Canton Avenue, believed to be the steepest municipal street in the world (San Francisco's steepest street has a 31.5 percent grade).

Riders travel between hills at a neutral pace along the 30-mile racecourse, but when one of the 13 hills is approached, an air horn is sounded to signal the rolling start of a hill climb competition. Points are awarded to the first ten riders up each hill, with the rider accumulating the most points winning the competition. To qualify as a finisher, riders have to summit each hill without losing forward progress or dismounting.

Only five starters -- and three finishers -- took part in the first Dirty Dozen back in 1983, but by 2011, the number of entrants had topped the 300 mark.

"You don't have to travel across the world to find something to add to your bucket list," said Yevuta, 63, who has been cycling for about 40 years. "If you look around in the area where you live, there are all kinds of neat little things like this race that give you an out of the ordinary kind of challenge -- something to get the juices flowing."

Yevuta, who had both Anderson and Rogers as students in his sixth grade class, said roads traversing the hills in the New Martinsville area provide good training terrain for the Pittsburgh race. "We have one hill with a 31 percent grade," he said.

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While Yevuta has walked the steepest hill on the Dirty Dozen course, Rogers has been riding sections of the course for the past three months, often toting a 20- to 30-pound pack to enhance his training regime.

"I've done 11 of the 13 hills," Rogers said, including the fabled Canton Avenue grade. "Your gearing and your approach have to be flawless to make it up the steeper hills," he said.

While Canton Avenue may be the steepest slope in the world, "the hardest one on the course is a hill off Suffolk Street, which is really a combination of three hills," Rogers said.

Rogers said he liked the fact that the Dirty Dozen, now run by Danny Chew, a nationally recognized distance rider and two-time winner of the Race Across America bike race, is a relatively informal, non-sanctioned competition, allowing riders of all skill levels to enter.

"I want to challenge myself and see if I can do what these other riders can

do," he said.

For Yevuta, simply finishing the race and reaching the summit of each of its hills would be a satisfying achievement. "I'm planning on being close to the back of the pack," he said. "I'd like to make it up the hills, but if I have to walk up one, I won't be crushed."

If nothing else, he said, "You get to see a heck of a lot of Pittsburgh. You're all over town, at some of the best viewpoints."

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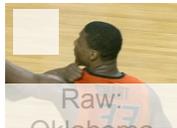
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