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National bicycle ride will publicize blood, organ donation needs

By Karen Allen
USA TODAY

When baseball Hall of Famer Rod Carew's 18-year-old daughter Michelle was dying of leukemia, he went public with her need for a life-saving matching bone marrow do-

Adventure sports

nor. More than 93,000 people called the National Marrow Donor program in Minneapolis to ask how they could help.

But a transfusion of blood cells from a donated umbilical cord came too late. Thursday, Carew marked the first anniversary of her death.

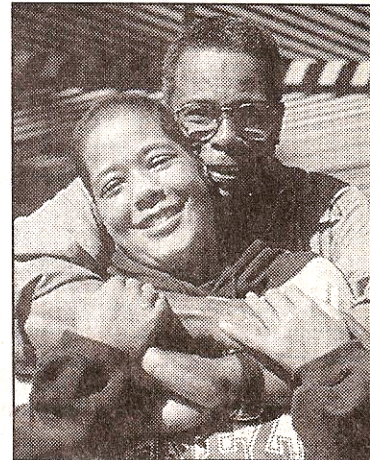
Carew, in his sixth season as the Anaheim Angels' batting coach, was in Minnesota, where his daughter is buried. There, his grief was private.

But next month he will go public again, supporting a coast-to-coast bicycle trip, the Five Points of Life Ride. The ride, which begins May 17, will cross nine states and visit more than 30 blood centers. And all along the way, it will ask the public to save lives by donating the "five points": whole blood, blood components (apheresis), organ and tissue, cord blood, and bone marrow.

"I'm not bad on a bicycle, but I'm not sure I could make it all the way across the country," Carew says. "But I think it's a great way to ask people to open their hearts. I'm doing whatever I can, because that's what I promised Michelle — to try to save other children just like her."

The ride will be done by average citizens, such as Barbara Kostorhryz, of Athens, Ohio, 44, who donated her 18-month-old daughter's organs in 1983; Rodney Ford, 36, a bank employee in Oklahoma City, who like Carew, wants to raise minority awareness; and Jerome Adamczyk, 27, of Somersworth, N.H., a youth counselor who was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in 1986 and is in remission.

But sports stars are leading the publicity charge. Because the ride is going through his home state of Alabama, Houston Rockets star Charles Barkley filmed a public service ad. Florida Marlins star Gary Sheffield plans to do the same. Cyclist Lance Armstrong, whose testicular cancer is in remission, is training again and wants to join in when



By Genaro Molina

Keeping a promise: Rod Carew, with daughter Michelle, helps donor drive

the ride crosses Texas. Pat Williams, vice president of the Orlando Magic, has pledged his support and is pushing for NBA-wide involvement.

Nancy Eckert, CEO of Life Source, which is organizing the ride, says sports help is exactly what it needs.

"Advertising is so expensive, and people have seen so much of it that we looked for another way to raise awareness. This developed," Eckert says. "We're strong on effort, short on dollars, so this is perfect."

The National Marrow Donor Program benefits directly every time a celebrity speaks. After NASCAR owner Rick Hendrick was diagnosed with leukemia, Daytona 500 winner Jeff Gordon and other drivers played the hotline number (1-800-MARROW2) on their windshields during the race, and the center received more than 13,000 calls.

"Sports figures are perceived as strong. People look up to them. And somehow, when they are touched by tragedy or revealed as having the same problems as the rest of the world, people respond," says the center's Andrea Carter. "For people like Rod Carew to continue to make what is a very private matter public because they want to help, that's what makes them true heroes."

On the road: Jim Howley's unprecedented across-the-U.S. triathlon has now reached Utah. Thursday, he rode a mountain bike on the trails near Moab and swam the 34-degree Colorado River. Howley's next challenge: cycling across the Rockies on his way to Denver.