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Weymouth man with Lou Gehrig's disease to ride again for fundraiser

By Allison Manning

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WEYMOUTH — When he finished a 9,000-mile motorcycle trip around the country last summer, Doug Oakley thought it would be the last big ride he took.

Oakley, 47, was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in November 2008. Also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. As it affects voluntary muscle action, patients may become paralyzed.

"I thought that last summer was the last time I'd be on a motorcycle," Oakley said.

But Oakley is still feeling good, and ready to tackle a trip across Canada, from Vancouver to Newfoundland, starting Monday. It's a 4,500-mile trip he expects to take 17 days.

"I'm physically able to attempt this ride, and I think I'll complete it," he said. "I think it probably will be the last summer, barring a miracle."

Oakley hopes to raise \$100,000 for Compassionate Care ALS, a Falmouth organization that supports patients, caregivers and families affected by ALS. He'd like to create a Cape Cod retreat for families coping with the disease.

A fundraiser will be held Friday at the Weymouth Elks Hall to help toward that goal.

In the last year, Oakley has become a board member of CCALS, raising money for the organization.

"I continue to call it 'paying it forward,'" he said. "At some point, I'm going to need a lot more of their services."

This year's ride is a tribute to his heritage; his parents and oldest brother were born in Canada. It's also to introduce CCALS to families in Canada.

Along the way, Oakley will stop at 15 Harley-Davidson dealerships that are participating in the ride, and will visit Canadian ALS chapters, which are holding fundraisers.

On July 9, his family will meet him in Toronto for the Blue Jays game against the Red Sox.

Some modifications had to be made to his Harley-Davidson Road King this year, including installing a different clutch that didn't require squeezing of his left hand.

"I think this trip is going to be physically a lot more challenging for me," he said. "Because my left hand doesn't work. Just things like tying my boots and zippering my coat, they're much more time consuming."

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Good luck to you....keep fighting the good fight!

Weymouth Resident

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