

Riding to raise spirits and funds

Although charity fundraising has slowed down because of the pandemic, Michael Liu, a Native English Teacher (NET), and his merry team have circumvented such obstacles to deliver a charitable gift just in time for Christmas



▲ Michael Liu

WITH two days before Christmas on a much more mechanical reindeer, a much younger Santa Claus rushes against the clock for gifts that have yet to be delivered. He pedals quicker and quicker, hoping to ease the chill of long winter nights for those less fortunate, much more than spare change might. He grits his teeth and pumps his legs to bring smiles to teachers as well as younger and older students alike.



Although the Grinch reveals itself in the form of unfriendly circumstances, the spirit of giving pushes our lone rider from behind, driving him to provide gifts of companionship, shelter and nourishment to those in need. Teachers and students echo their joys nearby, for they too hear the sleigh bells of a modern Christmas miracle.

Pedal power

WITH greased chains and a few essential items, Michael Liu, treasurer of the Native English Speaking Teacher's Association (NESTA) and seasoned cyclist, completed a metric century ride (approximately 105 km) to raise funds for ImpactHK, a charity aimed at supporting the homeless, and NESTA, an association that supports NETs professionally and personally. This metric century ride was a milestone for Michael, as he had not previously completed one prior to planning this fundraising ride.

"I felt fine, excited and slightly nervous!" he said. "Fine because I was well-prepared, excited because I was doing a century ride and raising money for a good cause and slightly nervous because I was afraid something might happen that could prevent me from completing the ride, eg, an

accident, flat tyre, etc."

Nighttime hazards

BECAUSE of his inexperience with cycling rides of this length, he did a practice run a week before to feel out the route.

"I thought the practice run for the century ride was more difficult because I started out much later and it gets dark here around 6pm," Michael explained. "Certain paths are lit up by street lamps but the rest are just totally dark. You can't see where you're going. Sometimes, these paths have potholes, as



well as some really bad wear and tear. But in the dark you can't really see anything." On the day of the actual ride, and contrary to the nocturnal practices of a more conventional Santa Claus, he rode under the safety and vision that sunlight gave with great success.

Noteworthy locations

HIS ride began in Yuen Long on 23 December at 10am and ended in Tai Wai at 4pm. His stops included prominent local tourist destinations including Wetland Park (located in Tin Shui Wai), Butterfly Beach (in Tuen Mun) and Tai Po Waterfront Pier.

In particular, Michael excitedly noted the significant local culture that the streets

of Tin Shui Wai had in open display, where street barbers conduct business and older chess players hone their skills. This communal atmosphere is one infrequently found amidst the hustle and bustle of deep metropolitan Hong Kong.

A personal best

AS he sped along cycling paths, he listened to music played out of his Bluetooth speakers and paid close attention to his surroundings.

Armed with knowledge of the route and with safety in mind, Michael did not take

long to finish the ride.

"I felt proud and exhilarated. Proud that I had completed it, and at a personal best pace too of 22.5 km/h. The next item on my cycling list is the real century ride, 100 miles (160.9 km)!"

After speaking with Michael, it became clear that his passion for cycling is infectious and easily felt. He explained that on top of fundraising for the needy, "I wanted to show the length and breadth of all the cycling paths in the New Territories, and also how healthy and fun cycling is!"

Making a positive impact

MICHAEL and the NESTA team have raised over HK\$10,000 that will both support NESTA activities, such as student competitions and professional development opportunities, and fund ImpactHK. ImpactHK is a charity aimed strictly at supporting the homeless by providing an all-round system of assistance that hopes to help these individuals readjust and become self-sustaining. Although raised funds are split between NESTA and ImpactHK, Michael readily looks to future events, stating that "the next time that I plan to do this, I want

all the proceeds to go to a local charity, rather than 50 percent to NESTA". However, regardless of how funds are allocated, Michael states that supporting those less fortunate was but one (albeit large) aspect of the challenge.

"I appreciate the government starting the NET scheme thinking that overseas teachers from abroad can bring something to the local curriculum and to local teachers," he said. "That's why we did this bike challenge: to give back to a local charity [and] give back to the local community."

Vocabulary :

circumvent (v) 繞過
nocturnal (adj) 夜間的

conventional (adj) 常規的
metropolitan (adj) 大都會的

breadth (n) 寬度
self-sustaining (adj) 自我維持的

albeit (con) 儘管
curriculum (n) 課程