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## Group races across America to save lives

San Mateo man in need of organ transplant appreciates effort to raise money, awareness

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Article Last Updated: 06/16/2007 02:53:49 AM PDT

SAN MATEO — While Dante Ravetti slept Thursday night, the bicycle team racing across the country in his honor passed Springfield, Colo., and slipped across the border into Kansas.

Ravetti, 77, is a dialysis patient awaiting a kidney transplant. Team Donate Life Grace Valley is one of 43 teams participating in Race Across America, a grueling road race from Oceanside to Atlantic City, N.J.

Ravetti, who lives in San Mateo, has never met any of the team's eight members, all of whom belong to Grace Valley Christian Center in Davis. But he said he is proud of their mission — raising money and awareness for the cause of organ donation.

Ravetti undergoes dialysis three times a week at Mills Hospital. The four-hour procedure cleanses his blood, a task his failing kidneys can no longer perform. He leaves the clinic drained of energy and without an appetite. He usually sleeps the rest of the day. Despite the hardship, Ravetti considers himself lucky. Because of his age, Ravetti is on the "extended criteria" list, meaning he is eligible for kidneys from donors who are older than 60 and have certain medical conditions that make them ill-suited for younger patients.

"I go to bed and we pray every night that we get a call," said Ravetti, who could be called at any time and given hours to get to a transplant center. His wife Terri spends much of her time looking after his needs.

"He's in the twilight of his years now, and he's losing them, because three

days a week are lost," Terri Ravetti said. "You start worrying about how much time you have left, and you're wanting to enjoy it to the fullest, and you're not able to do that."

As the Ravettis wait, Team Donate Life Grace Valley sprints East, accompanied by a 12-person crew driving five support vehicles. The race began Tuesday. Working in shifts, the team is pedaling practically nonstop and expects to make it to Atlantic City in six days.

Greg Chapla, a team member and assistant football coach at the University of California, Davis, said the group has raised \$50,000 for the ride. Some of it will cover expenses, while the rest will go to transplant research.

The Grace Valley congregation became interested in organ donation in part because one of its members underwent an organ transplant, said Chapla, whose team hopes to convince

4 million people to sign up to become donors.

Chapla likened someone dying without giving away healthy organs to "a millionaire being buried with his million dollars."

Nearly 97,000 Americans are on a waiting list for organ donations, according to statistics compiled by the federal government.

Katherine Doolittle, a public education coordinator for Golden Gate Donor Services, an organ-procurement organization, said 72,000 of those people are waiting for kidneys. One-third of them will die, she said.

Doolittle's organization is part of a system that determines where organs go once they become available. The group also works to raise public awareness for the cause of organ donation.

In 2005, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill authored by former state Sen. Jackie Speier that linked the Department of Motor Vehicles to a statewide organ donation list.

Doolittle said 1.5 million Californians are now registered as organ donors. The goal is to register the majority of the state's 24 million residents who are licensed to drive, she said.

"The most important thing for the state of California is for every individual to go to (the state's official registry) and register as soon as possible or as soon as they go to the DMV," Doolittle said.

The registry is available online at <http://www.donatelifecalifornia.org>

Doolittle said donating organs often helps families of the donors get through their grief.

"There are profound stories of organ recipients finally meeting the families of their donor," Doolittle said.

"There's a sense that that person is living on," she said. "And they are truly heroes in all of our eyes."