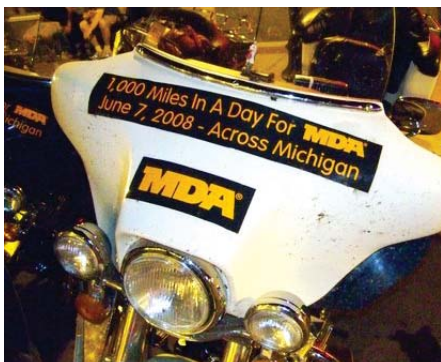
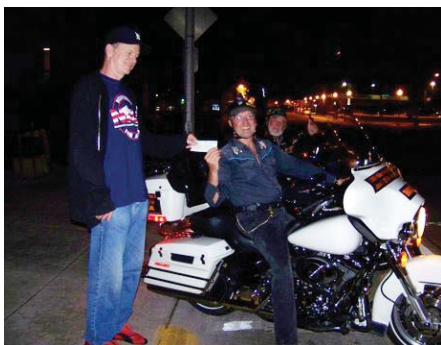


There's back again!

1,000-mile ride raises \$1,400 for MDA



The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu observed that a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. For letter carrier and motorcycle enthusiast John Dick, a member of Royal Oak, Michigan Branch 3126, his recent thousand-mile, one-day journey to raise funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association began not with a step, but a kick-start.

Just after 3 a.m. on Saturday, June 7, Dick, his father, Bob, and family friend Eric Hoeft met in the parking lot of the Royal Oak Post Office in suburban Detroit, fired up their Harley-Davidson motorcycles, then rolled out northbound. Their mission: ride to Iron Mountain, Michigan—on the western edge of the state's Upper Peninsula—and back to Royal Oak, all in one day, raising money for the NALC's official charity along the way.

Dick, a member of the second NALC Leadership Academy class of 2007, credits Academy co-leader and National MDA Coordinator Jim Williams for some of the inspiration for the ride. "When I graduated, I felt like I needed to do something spectacular for MDA," said the 48-year-old letter carrier, who has been riding two-wheelers since he was a youngster growing up in the outskirts of the Motor City.

Back then, "I had a Honda 50, and we would go out to where the Pontiac Silverdome is now," he told the Royal Oak *Daily Tribune*. "We" included Dick's cousin, Guy, his other source of motivation for the marathon ride. Guy began to show signs of muscular dystrophy when he was in kindergarten, Dick related, so he couldn't quite manage riding a motorcycle—but he could handle a go-kart, and would often join his cousin "tearing around out there."

Sadly, Guy's condition worsened, confining him to a wheelchair. He died in 1984 at age 21 of complications from the neuromuscular disease.

Mapping out a course

When Dick first sat down to discuss his long-ride idea with his 69-year-old father, "he said, 'It sounds crazy—but I'll go with you,'" the letter carrier recalled with a laugh. They broke out their calendars and worked out a weekend when they felt the weather would be ideal—"not too hot, not too cold," Dick said. They also settled on the thousand-mile figure and decided a round-trip ride between Royal Oak and Iron Mountain on the Wisconsin border would fill the bill.

Then, on that early Saturday morning, Branch 3126 MDA Coordinator Brian Koppin joined several other branch and family members, including John's wife, Jackie, at the Royal Oak Post Office to see the motoring trio off. Father and son—along with Hoeft, a friend who had gamely volunteered to join the expedition—gave their bikes one final safety check, donned their helmets, and by 3:30, they were on their way.

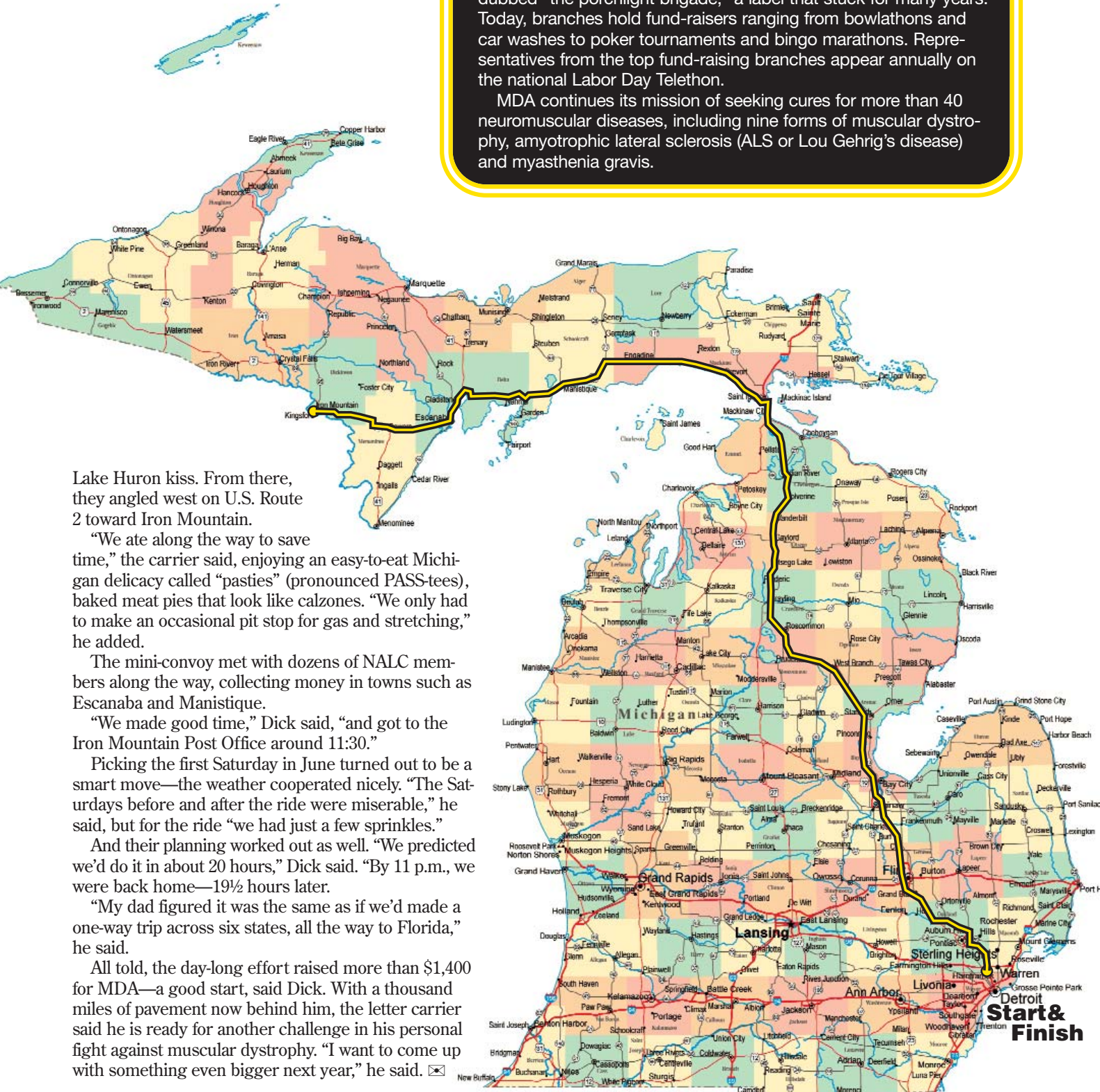
"We headed right up I-75," Dick said, cutting through the heart of Michigan in light traffic, aiming for the 5-mile-long Mackinac Bridge to cross over to the U.P. at the point the waters of Lake Michigan and

According to the Muscular Dystrophy Association,

more than a million Americans are affected by some neuromuscular disease, with a quarter of those having a form of muscular dystrophy.

MDA has been the NALC's official charity since 1952. During Thanksgiving week that year, after letter carriers made their usual rounds, they returned to the homes a second time later in the day to take up a special collection for MDA. Because these special visits were often being made after sunset, the volunteers were dubbed "the porchlight brigade," a label that stuck for many years. Today, branches hold fund-raisers ranging from bowlathons and car washes to poker tournaments and bingo marathons. Representatives from the top fund-raising branches appear annually on the national Labor Day Telethon.

MDA continues its mission of seeking cures for more than 40 neuromuscular diseases, including nine forms of muscular dystrophy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease) and myasthenia gravis.



Lake Huron kiss. From there, they angled west on U.S. Route 2 toward Iron Mountain.

"We ate along the way to save time," the carrier said, enjoying an easy-to-eat Michigan delicacy called "pasties" (pronounced PASS-tees), baked meat pies that look like calzones. "We only had to make an occasional pit stop for gas and stretching," he added.

The mini-convoy met with dozens of NALC members along the way, collecting money in towns such as Escanaba and Manistique.

"We made good time," Dick said, "and got to the Iron Mountain Post Office around 11:30."

Picking the first Saturday in June turned out to be a smart move—the weather cooperated nicely. "The Saturdays before and after the ride were miserable," he said, but for the ride "we had just a few sprinkles."

And their planning worked out as well. "We predicted we'd do it in about 20 hours," Dick said. "By 11 p.m., we were back home—19½ hours later.

"My dad figured it was the same as if we'd made a one-way trip across six states, all the way to Florida," he said.

All told, the day-long effort raised more than \$1,400 for MDA—a good start, said Dick. With a thousand miles of pavement now behind him, the letter carrier said he is ready for another challenge in his personal fight against muscular dystrophy. "I want to come up with something even bigger next year," he said. ☒