

# Weather doesn't damper Tour de Kota

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The 2011 Argus Leader Tour de Kota rolled into town Thursday, June 9, just in time for a downpour that left more than 2 inches of rain in the Vermillion area.

Despite this, organizers and riders said they were satisfied with how this leg of the tour went.

"It's one of those things that I think went as well as could be expected, given the conditions," said Maureen Cashin, visitor and tourism coordinator for the Vermillion Area Chamber & Development Company. "All in all, we made it work. It was just unfortunate. But what can you do? You've just got to make the most of it."

Owen Hotvet, circulation director for the Argus Leader and director of the tour, said the riders did the best they could, either seeking shelter on the road or riding through the rain.

"They're pretty resilient people, and they're prepared for it. They motor through it for the most part. They don't like lightning, of course," he said.

This was the first year the Tour de Kota riders stayed overnight in Vermillion, although they passed through on other tours.

The University of South Dakota took part by offering riders the option of staying in the Beede and Mickelson residence halls in the North Complex, or to set up tents outside on the lawn.

In the parking lot, businesses including Cherry Street Grill, Jones Food Center, Hy-Vee, Scoops, RED Steakhouse, Pizza Hut and Scotty D's Built for Barbeque of Huron set up booths to sell food to riders and local citizens.

The next morning, the Vermillion Lions Club held a pancake breakfast for the departing bikers. Although it was originally set to take place outside, the rain made it necessary to hold from the "temporary student center" near the North Complex.

"The Lions were able to bring their griddle inside, and they were able to serve in there," Cashin said. "I think they were fairly pleased with the turn-out there."

Another element of the stop's planned events – a performance by the band Poker Alice – had to be moved to Carey's Bar downtown.

Cashin said that the cooperation between the tour organizers, USD and the city was "excellent."

"The whole group has really pulled together to get all the facilities and logistics worked out, and they've been great," she said.

Tour de Kota has taken place for the past seven years, with an evolving tour map each year.

Hotvet described 2011's route as a "campus tour." Starting on Sunday, June 5, the riders set out from Augustana College in Sioux Falls to South Dakota State University in Brookings, a length of approximately 83 miles.

The following day, they went to Dakota State University in Madison, and headed to Mitchell on Tuesday. On Wednesday, they rode to Freeman.



Participants in the 2011 Argus Leader Tour de Kota roll into Vermillion Thursday. Thunderstorms that day forced changes in the greeting the community had planned for the bikers, but they welcomed the chance to get out of the rain and seek shelter on the USD campus.

(Photo courtesy of Steve Feimer)

The first biker pulled into Vermillion at around 9:30 a.m. Thursday, Cashin said.

After they departed Vermillion Friday morning, they headed back to Sioux Falls, with their final destination being the University of Sioux Falls.

Hotvet said organizers thought the campus tour "would be something different, something fun, and that's kind of what we're looking for. It's worked out really, really well. People like it, they like having the dorm option."

Overall, the ride went "quite well," he said, mainly because of the weather – Thursday's rain notwithstanding.

"(Thursday) really went well," he said. "We had kind of a tailwind, not too much headwind, and people got pushed along really well. The cool temps helped, they don't need as much fluid."

"I talked to one guy on (Tuesday). He said he drank 12 Gatorades and a bunch of water. He finished really well, but today he probably had one bottle of Gatorade and some water. It's really tough to gauge that stuff from day to day," he said.

Tuesday was the most difficult for the riders,

Hotvet said, because of the heat and a strong headwind.

"Each year, we have a patch to hand out when we have a headwind," he said. "We call it the 'windy day patch.'"

Geneva Grooters of Rock Rapids, IA, and Connie Hammje of Alexandria, MN, agreed with Hotvet's assessment. The women have taken an extended bike tour together each year since 1981, and have been on four of the seven Tour de Kotas. "This is the best year," Grooters said.

"With the exception of (Thursday)," Hammje added.

They said some of the other tours they've been on have offered a lot more rain.

"I'll take heat any day," Grooters said. "When you're wet and cold it's miserable. Or, if you have a constant headwind all day. That's just wearing on you."

Grooters and Hammje said they have enjoyed all the Tours because of the other riders, and because of the communities they visit.

"The people are very friendly," Grooters said. "All the towns have done a great job."

"This year the terrain has really been pretty," Hammje added. "There's been years where we've had a day where it was kind of boring for a while, and it was beautiful coming into Vermillion."

Hotvet said some of the riders have asked for next year's Tour de Kota to follow the same route, although he doesn't think it's likely to happen.

"We just haven't repeated one year to the next," he said. "It's a lot of work the communities go to to put this on, and as much as anything, I like to mix it up a bit. But I think that's an indication of how people have appreciated this route and the whole tour in general."

Cashin said everyone from Vermillion was happy to help out.

"We were excited to showcase our community, and the university was excited to showcase the school and all the great things that they provide," she said. "We're happy that Vermillion was on the tour and that they wanted to stay overnight here."

For more information, visit [www.tourdekota.com](http://www.tourdekota.com).

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Vermillion likely will have nearly a 1.5 positive effect.

In other words, every \$25 bill spent on June 25 will produce over \$37.

"When you stop to think what a multiplier is, it's how many times money is spent before it leaves town," he said. "There are different multipliers, so when you get your hair cut, you pay the person to cut your hair, and that's all labor, so then they have the money, and if they're from Vermillion, they may spend some of that money at the local dentist and so on."

"There are several different formulas – but the overriding thing that comes out of studying these different ratios and so forth, the overriding theme is, that money stays here," said Steve

Howe, executive director of the Vermillion Area Chamber of Commerce and Development Company. "The important thing is that the money is being spent locally, it's going into local businesses' pockets that are paying local property taxes and paying employees in the community, and subsequently, those employees are spending locally, too."

Bonnie Rowland, who has operated Raziels, a restaurant in downtown Vermillion, for nearly four years, knows firsthand the importance of spending locally to all retailers in Vermillion.

She is excited to be part of a Main Street business district that has blossomed in the last year with new restaurants that provide additional opportunities for all downtown retailers to prosper.

Rowland opens her business' doors every day to serve Vermillion residents, USD students, and visitors to the

community, including many of those students' parents.

"Now that we have more restaurants downtown, I'm finding that the street is getting a bit busier down here," she said. "It really does bring more people downtown, and I'm enjoying it."

To remain successful, Vermillion businesses like Raziels' must compete with more than just counterparts in the community to attract customers.

"Especially when we have Sioux City only a bit over 20 miles away one way, and Sioux Falls only about 50 miles north,"

Rowland said. "It's fun to keep people down here, coming to Vermillion and checking it out, and eating and shopping."

"They don't have to go to Sioux Falls or Sioux City when they are passing through to find some fun stuff," she said.

"Every dollar does matter that is spent locally," Howe said. "From a 'shop local' standpoint, there seems to be a perception at times that you can't get what you need here. I hope promotions like the 'spend \$25 on the 25th' will get people out and looking at the stores, and they'll be able to find

what they need here in town."

Rowland herself has discovered that Vermillion is the place to be to experience a wide range of different cuisine.

"I eat out a lot," she said. "I'm forever going to our Mexican restaurant, or across the street, and you easily discover that you don't have to go to Sioux Falls or Sioux City to get something good to eat, because we have everything right here."

"When you find what you need here in town, it means you don't have to jump in your car and drive 40 minutes to get what you

need," Howe said. "Just in gas alone, especially if you drive a pickup like me, a round trip to Sioux Falls is \$25. It doesn't make any sense to make that trip and spend that money to buy something there that you can buy locally."

"With the cost of transportation so high right now, you really should be looking local for those things that you need," he said, "and when you start looking, you're going to find more and more things that you didn't realize were here."

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