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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Criterium excitement is coming to the streets of downtown West Chester

On July 9 in West Chester, many cyclists and spectators at the Iron Hill Twilight Criterium will be unaware that competitive cycling traces its history back to May 1868 when the first bicycle race was held at Parc de Saint-Cloud, a famous French estate. Englishman James Moore rode to victory on a bicycle made of wood and wheels of iron. Today, though much has changed, the same competitive drive remains.

As West Chester prepares for the seventh year of racing excitement on its downtown streets, many who are not immersed in the world of cycling may be wondering about the history and strategies of competitive racing and what exactly *is* a “criterium.”

Cycling events fall into several broad categories, with road races, stage races and criteriums the most common.

A road race is a one-day event that covers a longer route (usually over 60 kilometers/37.28 miles). Generally there are two types of road racing: one that consists of several laps around a circuit with a shared start and finish line or a route that goes from point A to point B, often one town to another. A stage race is made up of multiple races ridden consecutively over several days, with the winner determined by the rider with the lowest cumulative time. The most famous stage race is the Tour de France, which typically consists of 20 daylong stages covering about 2,200-plus miles.

But by far the most popular form of bike racing in the United States is the criterium. Unlike a road race or a stage race, a criterium is a race held on a short course (usually under 5 kilometers/3.11 miles), often on closed-off downtown streets. Criteriums tend to be especially popular with spectators because of the many times the riders pass by at very high speeds. This type of race also allows viewers to watch the action as it unfolds.

Success in criteriums requires a mix of skills: perhaps most notably the strength to accelerate to speeds of 35 mph or more, and the ability to take city corners rapidly while not drifting into the paths of other riders. A skilled rider will also be adept at taking advantage of the aerodynamic benefit that comes from “drafting,” that is, staying in the slipstream of the rider in front, and thus significantly reducing the amount of energy he or she needs to expend. One study estimated that riding in the slipstream of a pack uses 40% less energy than riding individually.

Whether one is aware of the ins and outs of competitive cycling or not, the sheer visual excitement of the event is certain to be enjoyed by the thousands of spectators expected to line the .8-mile course in downtown West Chester. Past participants have admitted they enjoyed being tested by the town’s narrow streets, demanding tight turns and high-speed straight-aways giving spectators plenty to cheer about!

Following the racing action will be easier than ever this year thanks to an innovative new app for Apple and Android-based smartphones. Spectators will be able to receive timely postings during each bike race, including the lap count and listing of the top riders. The app will be available at no cost through the Iron Hill Twilight Criterium website or the West Chester Chamber of Commerce website starting in June.

Once again the West Chester Iron Hill Twilight Criterium will hold a “pivotal” position in the USA CRITS National Criterium Series since it will mark the halfway point in this 10-race Championship Series. Often called the “Race Through America,” USA CRITS began on April 30 in Athens, Georgia, and will continue for six months throughout the country, ending on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC.

Complementing all the racing excitement at this year's event is a day full of family-friendly activities throughout the downtown area. Besides the many one-of-a-kind shops, boutiques and restaurants for which the town is justly famous, many special race-day events will be returning.

With its business bazaar, food stands and numerous other activities, the Kinetic Physical Therapy Community Festival will be pleasing spectators on High Street, between Market and Gay Streets. The Market Street Block Party between Church and Darlington Streets will return for another year of family-friendly activities and live music. By popular demand, the Kids' Zone will once again give children a great place to play. New this year will be the Grand Sport Auto Cool Zone, where visitors will have an opportunity to escape the July sun and relax in the cool shade.

Of course the day's featured racing couldn't begin until after the West Chester Dental Arts Kids' Race at 5:00 p.m.! Here, children have the opportunity to discover for themselves the fun and excitement of cycling. This friendly competition is free and open to all kids between the ages of 3 and 10. Winning is just one of the goals on the minds of the children as they furiously pedal their two- or three-wheel bikes and Big Wheels towards the finish line, pushed onward by the non-stop cheering of family and friends.

The Iron Hill Twilight Criterium is presented by the West Chester Cycling Classic, a subsidiary of the Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce, and is a part of the USA CRITS Championship Series, a 10-race series of races in nine cities that will determine the best Criterium racers in America. For more information, go to www.IronHillTwilightCriterium.com or call 610-696-4046.

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