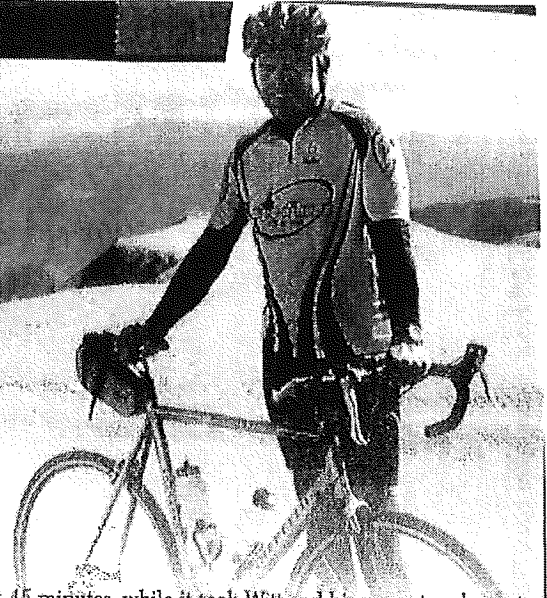


Real Estate
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After HOURS

One More Mountain



ASK ANY OF YOUR FRIENDS WHAT THEIR IDEA OF a perfect vacation is, and a beach will probably feature prominently in the answer. Or perhaps a quiet lake or a vibrant city. Ronald Witt's response, however, is likely to include mountains and some of the most difficult biking terrain the world has to offer. Because Witt, CEO of Sweetwater Construction in Cranbury, is a cyclist like few others, Europe's most challenging bike routes haven't slowed him a bit.

Although he's been riding all his life, Witt didn't pursue arduous road biking until Lance Armstrong captured the world's attention by blazing his way to seven straight Tour de France titles, starting in the late 1990s.

"When Armstrong started winning the Tour, it piqued my interest," Witt relates. "We'd always had bikes and gone out for little rides, but being serious about riding, and riding longer distances, came when his run of wins in the Tour de France started."

For Sweetwater CEO Ron Witt, biking and construction are all about preparation.

Fittingly, Witt's first major biking trip, in 2005, followed the Tour de France riders over their legendarily grueling route.

"On that trip, we would ride the same course as the Tour riders and then stop," he explains. "The Tour riders usually start at 11 AM. We would start at eight and then stop and watch the tour go by. That was great, it was a lot of fun."

While on that trip, Witt had the opportunity to tackle the Alpe d'Huez, a mountain so difficult to climb it defies the Tour's ratings for degree of difficulty, which rank the mountains from one to four, four being the easiest and one being the hardest. Alpe d'Huez, along with Mount Ventoux, another French mountain Witt has biked, belong to the hors-catégorie, a special category for the toughest peaks.

Witt modestly (and with the slightest amount of self-deprecation) reports that Armstrong was able to complete Alpe d'Huez in

about 45 minutes, while it took Witt and his group two hours to finish. This would be a remarkable feat for anyone, and it's made even more remarkable by the fact that Witt took the trip to celebrate his 60th birthday.

As one might expect, these trips are not for dilettantes or weekend cyclists. They take hard work, training and conditioning. Witt reports that he's normally on his bike six days a week, and he's installed an indoor trainer so he can stay in shape during the winter. His wife, Nancy, says that before the Tour de France trip, he was up early every morning, biking 30 miles before he went into work.

Witt is no stranger to hard work and preparation—he's been doing it for almost 40 years, ever since he joined the construction business.

"If you're going to do something like these bike trips or a construction project, there's a lot of preparation involved," he explains. "Any construction project takes a considerable amount of up-front work so when you actually go to do the project, you've already done all the work that you need to prepare for it. The bike trips are similar. If you don't put the miles in and ride your bike in preparation for it, when you actually get to the event, you'd fizzle out after a very short period of time."

It's not just preparation and training, but also steely resolve that's needed when the going gets tough—either on the construction site or the bike trail.

"Determination is important," he says. "The determination to climb so many hills, it's very difficult. And in construction, there are always situations in projects where the going gets difficult and you have to have the determination to keep going and see it through to the end."

Since the Tour de France trip, Witt has biked from Prague to Vienna, in Tuscany and Southern Italy and in the Canadian Rockies, usually in the company of his wife and friends. The dollar's weak state has put a hold on European biking tours for the time being, but Witt does have an ambitious dream trip in mind.

"I'd like to go to New Zealand," he says. "It's supposed to be great riding, they have beautiful mountains and the countryside is supposed to be absolutely spectacular. My dream trip right now would be to spend a couple of weeks bike riding in New Zealand."—*Brianne Harrison*