

Drive through Centreville on a Thursday night and you may see a pack of yellow-clad bicyclists. Though many are avid cyclists, they aren't just pedaling for fun: They're feeding their neighbors.

Touchette Bicycle Food Mission—created and spearheaded by Touchette Regional Hospital President Jay Willsher—is a non-profit volunteer organization that addresses food insecurity in Centreville and East St. Louis, where food deserts are common. The COVID-19 crisis only exacerbated residents' difficulty in accessing affordable, healthy options.

Every Thursday evening, volunteers from the hospital and cycling community join forces to prepare and deliver items like fruit, sandwiches and burritos to their neighbors in need.

In an average week, these passionate volunteers provide more than 1,100 nutritious meals to:

- Six housing communities;
- Five mobile home communities;
- One homeless shelter; and
- Additional families and individuals.

Willsher explains the program's origin: "Bicycling is something that I love to do. I had participated in a similar organization prior to my move to Touchette. When presented with the opportunity to form the mission and merge giving back and cycling, I jumped on it!"

Excited about the program's potential to change lives, volunteers plan to expand their routes in the future in order to reach more people. They recently expanded drop-off locations to include local stores. And don't worry—if bad weather intervenes like the Midwestern winters tend to do, volunteers will pivot to delivering meals by vehicle. Until then, they're riding on.

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