

News Release

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Firefighters 'Chase the Sun' for Cycle Challenge

A team of cyclists from Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service will be taking part in an annual cycle challenge in June, to honour a former firefighter who tragically passed away whilst on duty in August 2016 - something they have done ever since.

The team of 14 firefighters will join hundreds of other cyclists in a coast to coast cycle challenge called 'Chase the Sun', which sees riders set off at sunrise and arrive at their destination by sunset.

Taking part in the 'Chase the Sun' challenge was originally suggested by former Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service firefighter, Paul 'TL' Wilkens, a keen cyclist and part of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service Cycling Club.

Sadly, Paul never got to take part in 'Chase the Sun', which he hoped would have been the team's annual challenge. In memory of Paul, his colleagues which included his brother Simon, friends and cycle team mates successfully took part in their first 'Chase the Sun' challenge, the year after Paul passed away.

Keeping up with the tradition the team completed a further 'Chase the Cheddar' event last year, cycling from Hinckley to Cheddar Gorge, before cycling to Burnham on Sea to support a colleague taking part in 'Chase the Sun'. Over this weekend, the team cycled a massive 320 miles – another great achievement.

This year, on Saturday 22 June, the team will be cycling from Tynemouth in Tyne and Wear, to Prestwick in Scotland. Cycling 200 miles from Northern England to Scotland, the challenge will take them approximately 12-14 hours of continuous cycling to complete. Setting off at dawn, the team will be tackling 3,200 meters of hills along the way before arriving in Scotland at dusk.

Simon Wilkens, firefighter at Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service and brother of Paul, said: "As this was something Paul and I had planned to do together, it always becomes an emotional journey before the cycle challenges start.

"We hope that in doing this event the whole of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service will all remember Paul by doing and supporting something he thoroughly enjoyed."

The team will not only be riding in Paul 'TL' Wilkens memory, but they will also be riding and raising money for two charities, [The Fire Fighters Charity](#) and [The Laura Centre](#).

The Fire Fighters Charity provides physical, mental health and social wellbeing support to past and present members of the fire service community. The Laura Centre, who supported Simon and his family through the difficult period after their tragic loss, provides bereavement support to anyone who has lost a child or for children and young people who have lost a parent, carer or significant adult in their lives.

In preparation for the 'Chase the Sun', the team will be doing a static bike ride to further raise money for the charities. On Saturday 8 June, they will be attempting to cycle the equivalent of 200 miles at Asda, Thurmaston.

They are hoping for as many supporters and donations as possible throughout the two challenges, in order to help them raise as much money as possible for the chosen charities.

If you would like to support the team and their chosen charities, you can do so by visiting www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/simon-wilkens-1 . All donations are welcomed.

You can keep up-to-date with the teams progress via our social media channels, Facebook ([/LeicsFireRescue](#) and [/LFRSCC](#)) and Twitter ([@LeicsFireRescue](#)), using the hashtag #ChaseTheSun.

For more information about the 'Chase the Sun' challenge, visit www.chasesun.org/.

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Notes to Editors:

Interviews can be arranged through prior arrangement with Corporate Communications on the details below.

About the Service

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service provides emergency response, prevention and protection services from 20 stations across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Its headquarters is based in Birstall, Leicester.

The Service's prevention, education, enforcement and inspection programmes have resulted in significant reductions in the number of incidents. In the last ten years, fire-related incidents have reduced by 43 percent.

During 2016/17, the Service attended 694 road traffic collisions, of which 148 were extrications from vehicles, in addition to 2,259 fires. 272 schools were visited as part of the Service's schools programme, delivering fire and road safety education to pupils. Staff organised or took part in 1,613 community safety events, promoting fire and road safety and arson prevention, and 145 Virtual Fatal Four (VF4) events as part of the Service's young drivers' road safety project.

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