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Cyclists raise money for Sandy relief under the stars

LONG BRANCH — With the view of the Atlantic Ocean in front and a starlit, evening sky above them, nearly 200 spin-cycling enthusiasts entertained passers-by on the boardwalk at Pier Village last night with a high-intensity workout to raise money for Sandy relief and diabetes research.

Billed as Cycling Under the Stars, the event was hosted and led by fitness instructor Franci Cohen and Gold's Gym in Long Branch. Participating cyclists and event sponsors raised \$8,000 for the Hurricane Sandy NJ Relief Fund and the American Diabetes Association Tour de Cure.

Cohen, who teaches fitness classes at gyms in Brooklyn and Long Branch, helped attendees work up a sweat for their causes with a routine that included simulated mountain climbs, downhill racing and weight-lifting.

The beat of pop and dance music pumped. Glowing neon lights flashed. Fog crept across the stage. Watch the video above to check out Gold's Gym's night of cycling for a cause.

"Spinning is a very popular exercise ... many people love to ride," Cohen said. "To ride outdoors is fantastic, but under the stars, even more so.

"To do it for a great cause, one that specifically affects New Jersey itself, Hurricane Sandy relief, what could be better than that?" she said.

One hundred stationary bikes were set up on the boardwalk for two, one-hour sessions held Tuesday evening. The cost of each session was \$36.

"It's an intense spin," said 17-year Red Bank Catholic senior Margaret Rooney of Brielle. "We go hard."

Rooney and a group of seven friends turned up for the opportunity to train with Cohen and kick in some funds to the two causes.

"She (Cohen) is a really great teacher but she is very tough to keep pace with," said Ronette Mansour, 21, a summer resident of Long Branch.

Heavy rainfall during the day almost forced the organizers to hold the event indoors. But the rain clouds dispersed in time for the 8 p.m. kick-off.

“It couldn’t be more perfect. We spoke at one o’clock and it looked like it was going to clear up and be a cool night. And it turned out to be very comfortable for the event, not too hot or muggy,” said Mark Steinfield, owner of Gold’s Gym at Pier Village.

Event sponsors were Jersey Pump, Fuel and Danskin.