Partnering with the Rotary Club of Clermont-Ferrand, Rotary District 1740, France, a young Frenchman, Julien Leblay , has been touring worldwide on his bicycle to promote voluntary blood donation. Since 2004, when he and a friend founded the organization Voyageurs au Grand Coeur (The Great Heart Travelers), he has bicycled almost 31,000 kilometers on three continents - Europe, South America and Oceania - often visiting and talking to, among others, Rotary clubs along the way about blood donation. His interest in promoting voluntary blood donation started some years back, when he, at age 16, had a near fatal accident.

Now, at age 28, *Julien Leblay* is preparing a new stage world tour. In July 2010, he embarks on a 20 month trip through Europe, the Middle East/Asia and Oceania. Together with his wife, 23 year-old *Marion Dumas Cheilletz*, he will be taking off from France on July 4, hoping to arrive in Auckland, New Zealand, some 26,000 kilometers later, in September 2011 in time for the rugby world cup. The tour ends in Australia in March 2012. According to their schedule, the bicycle trip will bring Julien and Marion through more than 20 countries.

To celebrate the departure, a blood drive is planned for June 25 in Saint Genes Champanelle, France. "We hope to have 200 persons give their blood for this special day. So, you are welcome," *Julien Leblay* writes at his website.

On his blood donation tours, he has been supported and sponsored by local Rotary clubs in cities and towns through which he has passed. The Rotary Club of Clermont-Ferrand helps by contacting various Rotary clubs along the route around the globe. Local Rotarians assist with accommodation and speaking opportunities. "They invite many journalists to meet us and organize blood drives in co-operation with the blood organization in the country," Julien Leblay says.

Back in France in 2012, Julien and Marion hope to publish two books and make a movie. In 2013 they intend to give 150 speeches in France about their experience. "This trip is one of the numerous ones that complete the world tour by bike to promote blood donation," Julien Leblay says.

With the new trip, the Frenchman will pass 50,000 kilometers promoting voluntary blood donation.

Since the start of his organization, Julien has already given more than 200 interviews on TV, radio, in newspapers and in magazines. He has had five books published with 5000 copies sold in France. In addition he has given many lectures in France and abroad. In 2009, he has been giving 100 talks all over France.

Julien is a former member of Rotaract, but no longer active due to his extensive travels.

The way it all started

Julien Leblay had just turned 16 on August 27, 1997, when he had a serious accident on a tractor and severely damaged his lungs. For several days he hung between life and death. He needed many blood transfusions in order to stay alive.

"This near-to-death experience made a big impression in my life and turned me into a more conscious and stronger person aware of real life values," he says.

When *Julien* was released from the hospital, he started to ride a bicycle, including in strenuous mountains, to improve his respiratory capacities. In 2003, he and his best friend, *Fabien Leszczynski*, decided to make a European tour - *Fabien* on a motorbike, *Julien* on a bicycle - with a cause: To promote voluntary blood donation.

And this was the start of Voyageurs au Grand Coeur/ The Great Heart Travelers, founded by two best-friends in France.

"Not being able to donate my blood (because of the blood transfusion he received during his hospitalization), my bike tours are the only way I found to return the favor to generous and unknown blood donors who saved my life. Thanks again for such a gift", *Julien Leblay* says.

During the 2010 tour, *Julien Leblay* will be reporting daily on his website "with many pictures and commentaries".

Julien Leplay was transfused at 16 years old and is now a traveler and writer.

Marion Dumas Cheilletz is a Physiotherapist.

Footnotes: ***Voyageurs au Grand Coeur* / The Great Heart Travelers' website has the address http://voyage-grand-coeur.org . Part of the website has been translated into English. The site is frequently updated with text and pictures. See also** the related articles **My blood for others in France** , posted at our website April 23, 2009; French **Rotary blood drive spreads to Africa** , posted July 20, 2008 and **Blood donor drive in France** , posted January 22, 2007.