

SUPER

MEN & WOMEN



»»» **On Wheels**
Men and Women of Steel, from left, Jim Kruse, John Martin, Josh Johnson and Diana Schowe.

They're not birds. They're not planes. And they certainly don't leap tall buildings in a single bound. But they are the Men of Steel.

While admitting they are not "super men," Men of Steel founders Jim Kruse and John Martin are more than mere cyclists. They have become ambassadors for the sport of cycling, and you can find their Men of Steel Racing team breaking away from the pack and leading generations of new adventurers down the road on any given summer's night.

For 42-year-old Jim Kruse, cycling started as a way to get back into shape. "I'd been sitting behind a desk putting on a few pounds," he said with a chuckle. "As a kid, I had cycled, and I always wondered how

good I might have been if I hadn't given it up." Kruse had switched from cycling to cross-country running in high school after being hit by a car. "My parents were afraid for me."

"I never stopped following the sport, though," he recalled. "It was easy to get back into, and I found that Fort Wayne has a great cycling infrastructure. I started really trying to push myself. How fast could I go? How far could I go?"

That curiosity led Jim to John Martin, 40, who rode competitively with Purdue while studying engineering in college. "We met at an area Tuesday night ride and discovered we shared a love of cycling and racing," Martin said.

Men of Steel was forged out of a semi-

rhetorical question they asked one another while attending the North American Handmade Bicycle Show. While in many circles, steel is thought of as too heavy for competitive racing, its traditions in the cycling community go back hundreds of years. "There was a great history of artisans using steel to build their own bicycles, and the craftsmanship was amazing," Martin said. "Wouldn't it be nice to bring it back?"

That idea sparked a website. Kruse's wife Mylien handles all of the marketing and communications for the group. These efforts attracted a strong following and ultimately led to the creation the Men of Steel cycling club.

The club is an all-inclusive organization whose purpose is to support

anyone who wants to ride — regardless of their age or ability. "Some just want to get out and ride," Kruse said. "It's social for them, but it's also an investment in a lifelong, healthy activity that can be enjoyed by anyone."

For those with a more competitive appetite, Team Men of Steel exists to satisfy that appetite. "Think of the club as almost a cycling support team," Martin said. "It builds confidence and assists riders with learning the sport. From that larger group, the competitive racing team came to be."

And women, don't let the name fool you. In addition to being active members of the club, the Women of Steel Racing team exists for those who wish to compete in women's triathlons.

As Men of Steel Racing grows, so does its reach. There are about 1,000 cyclists in Indiana who are registered with USA Cycling, the governing body for the sport. Promoting a mission of health, fitness and the fun of cycling, Kruse doesn't mind tooting the horn of Men of Steel Racing. "We're a pretty cool group. Good for cycling. Good for Fort Wayne."

That obligation to both the Fort Wayne and cycling communities led Kruse and Martin to join up with the City of Fort Wayne, Parkview Hospital and other local groups and businesses to sponsor one of the largest cycling events in the Midwest.

The Parkview Cycling Festival began in 2009, and each June, the competition

displays some of the finest talent Fort Wayne and cycling has to offer. With seven unique races designed to challenge cyclists of all ages and abilities, the Parkview Cycling Festival is an event even the casual rider can enjoy.

"While the competition is fun, the most enjoyable aspect is the social interaction and the friends I've made cycling," Kruse admitted. "Cycling lets you see the world around you much differently. The social interaction between new riders and veteran riders is amazing. We're mentoring new riders all the time. Whether someone joins for fun, to exercise/get in shape or to compete, there's something in it for everyone and it's something you can do for the rest of your life."