

# The Mercury News

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## Pathway Society holds biking fundraiser to surmount biggest challenge: budget cuts

Nonprofit's CEO is riding a 1.8-mile loop in Los Gatos until he climbs the height of Mount Everest



Pathway Society CEO Gary Montrezza, seen here cycling in the Italian Alps, is riding his bike to raise money for the nonprofit on May 21. Montrezza's Everest Ride will see him complete a 1.8-mile loop in Los Gatos multiple times until he climbs the height of Mount Everest. (Courtesy photo)



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Healing can be described as a long, looping process with many ups and downs, and Pathway Society CEO Gary Montrezza is aiming to illustrate that to raise money for his nonprofit organization with an Everest ride fundraiser on May 21.

The Pathway Society has offered substance abuse and counseling services in Santa Clara County since 1968. They provide addiction treatment through recovery residences and outpatient facilities. They serve about 1,600 to 1,700 people per year, Montrezza said. The nonprofit operates two outpatient facilities in Morgan Hill and Santa Clara, as well as a men's facility for in-patient residential treatment and detoxification in downtown San Jose.

"Our business model is people," said Montrezza. "We're in the business of emotions. We're in the business of addiction and helping people improve their lives and provide a social net that we can be proud of in one of the richest countries in the world."

The organization has typically relied on government funds to provide services and has never had a fundraiser. This year, Pathways is hosting its first "recovery ride" fundraiser to raise money for a second detoxification facility next to the first one in downtown San Jose. Montrezza said the expansion has been in the works since 2023, when the county board of supervisors declared a behavioral health treatment emergency.

The Pathway Society was awarded a \$6.5 million state grant to build the new facility, a three-story building with 30 beds, which would effectively double its capacity. Montrezza said they were considering reserving one floor for women following the closure of the Mariposa Lodge, which housed the county's only accessible detoxification and residential treatment center exclusively for women, according to a Change.org petition.

However, their plans were impacted by budget cuts at the county and federal levels as a result of the county's structural deficit and the passage of HR1. The grant only covers construction, but the Pathway Society needs to raise extra money to pay for the medical staff and furnishings for the rooms. Montrezza said that they've lost almost \$350,000, resulting in the closure of a few recovery homes. They also sought to consolidate services at their downtown San Jose facility and held off on hiring three new employees, but no jobs were lost.

"There'll just be less capacity for people to have safe housing when they are going to our out-patient programs, because it runs hand-in-hand," Montrezza said.

To raise money and awareness for people who struggling with substance abuse and recovery, Montrezza will be doing an "Everest ride," which is when a cyclist climbs the equivalent of Mount Everest—around 29,000 feet—in one attempt by repeating a hill climb segment until the altitude of Mount Everest is attained. Just over 30,000 cyclists have completed an Everest ride.

"I was looking for a way that symbolized the struggle that people in recovery and treatment face every day," said Montrezza. "The analogy of a mountain and sliding down a mountain or the suffering that goes into that is something that was compelling to me."

Montrezza will be starting his bike ride at the Los Gatos Civic Center at 110 E. Main St. in at midnight, and he will ride his route until around 5:30 p.m. He said he chose a 1.8-mile loop that cuts through Testarossa Winery because he wanted his bike ride to be publicly visible. He will have to complete this loop 108 times. To help with the mental challenge of this feat, Montrezza will be biking portions of the ride with Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen, former KTVU journalist Frank Somerville and Los Gatos Mayor Rob Moore, according to a press release.

Moore said he got involved in the ride because he supports Montrezza's efforts to raise awareness about substance use recovery as someone who had seen many people close to him struggle with drugs and alcohol and enter recovery programs.

"I think that leaders...being able to be very outward in sharing about the courage of someone to recover from substance use disorders is amazing," Moore said. "I'm excited to help the Pathway Society in their mission to spread awareness and help more people on their journey of recovery."

Raul Soto, a Pathway Society substance abuse counselor, will also be biking with Montrezza. He was previously a client with the nonprofit, recovering from methamphetamine addiction after his last arrest in 2013 for possession of narcotics. He credits Pathways' professional, compassionate and kind support for helping him achieve sobriety. After 11 years in recovery, Soto applied to work with Pathways as an assistant manager to give back to the nonprofit.

One of the biggest donors of the event is Valley Services, a site services contractor that provides portable toilets, temporary fencing and other services for events and construction and demolition projects. Valley Services director of operations Eldrich Evaristo will be biking with Montrezza for some of the ride. He said his company aligns with Pathway Society's mission of giving people second chances. Many of the people they employed had come from "unfavorable backgrounds," like formerly incarcerated people and recovering drug addicts and alcoholics.

"When we were approached by the Pathway Society to potentially support the ride and just the organization in general, it definitely hit home to us," Evaristo said. "We believe people should have the resources to give themselves a second chance in order to work and better their lives."

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