

Jessica Green



## Ride of Her Life

**A MOTHER'S TRIBUTE TO HER AUTISTIC DAUGHTER ENTERS ITS THIRD YEAR**

Twenty-seven-year-old Jessica Green never believed that disability hindered athleticism. In fact, she was convinced of the opposite. Autistic herself, Green found intense physical activity therapeutic in a way that little else was. From the time she was a child, she suffered intractable, prolonged tantrums as a result of her autism, and found relief in the sensory-integrating activity of bicycle riding.

"She'd say, 'Mom, my brain feels better when I ride my bike,'" recalls her mother, Helen Green. "Jessica was constantly soliciting neighbors to 'ride with me.'"

Green chose that phrase for the event that honors her daughter, who died from complications from a seizure in December 2007. The Jessica Green Foundation hosts the third annual "Ride with Me" event on Saturday, March 6, at Camp Milton, 1175 Halsema Road, near the Jacksonville-Baldwin rails-to-trails bike path. Courses range from 100 kilometers to five-mile "fun rides" for families. Proceeds benefit the

foundation, which funds autism support activities for families struggling with the devastating neurological disorder.

Green says her daughter's athleticism helped Jessica cope with her own autism, and it also gave her a great outreach tool.

In addition to bike riding, Jessica played varsity fast-pitch softball, organized exhibition games for families so parents could see their disabled children play ball, and Rollerbladed to raise money for the now-defunct Webb Center.

Green says she will never forget the hard times she went through with Jessica and wants to help support other families who struggle with disabled family members. "The numbers are growing, and the needs of families are growing," Green says. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics says that 1 in 91 children are diagnosed with autism; and 1 in 58 boys.

For more information on the ride or to register online, go to [ridewithmeforautism.org](http://ridewithmeforautism.org). □