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New cycling event promises thrills for racers and fans

The Issue: The Reading Radsport Festival will be held over two days in September.

Our Opinion: Bringing professional bicycle racing to the area is beneficial in many ways.

THE DEVELOPMENT of a new cycling event in Reading and neighboring communities this summer is great news for our area, both for those who enjoy racing on two wheels and those who appreciate the thrill of watching great athletes at work.

We congratulate the organizers of the Reading Radsport Festival, to be held Sept. 8 and 9, for pulling the event together so quickly in the wake of community leaders' June decision not to go through with this year's planned Reading 120 Classic of the Americas. The

Reading 120 was a professional road race in which riders competed on a 122-mile course. The event was held here in 2015 and 2016, but logistical challenges this year led organizers to scrap it in favor of something different.

The committee that had been formed to plan the Reading 120 for this year's Classic of the Americas succeeded in smoothly switching gears and coming up with an inspired idea despite having little time to plan.

The festival will feature cycling races for children and recreational

and professional cyclists from across the country. Highlights include a Mount Penn Hill Climb race Sept. 8 and the West Reading Twilight Criterium race Sept. 9.

There will be musical performances, special activities for children and food trucks for spectators to enjoy. As part of the celebration, there will be a ceremony celebrating the expected completion of reconstruction work on Skyline Drive, which is prime territory for cyclists. Proceeds from all the activities will benefit the Reading Recreation Commission and other local organizations. The event, which will offer more than \$21,000 in prize money, is sponsored by Reading Eagle Company, Penn National Gaming, Pretzel City Productions, WEEU and the Edwin Barbey Charitable Trust.

While the Reading 120 certainly offered its share of excitement, there are some distinct advantages to the way the Radsport Festival is set up. For one thing, the activities are concentrated in a fairly small area rather than being spread out all over the county. This greatly simplifies the logistics for the event and makes it possible for spectators to see more racing. And organizers are promising an event in which the whole community can participate.

It was especially important to stage a bike race this year and avoid losing the momentum our community had gained from hosting the Reading 120 for two years.

Berks County, with its beautiful scenery, varied terrain and central location, is becoming a popular destination for cyclists, and activities such as the Reading Radsport Festival

help enormously to emphasize that point. It's even better that the event is raising money for the Reading Recreation Committee's important programs that do so much to serve the community. And if it inspires some people to start riding and enjoying a fun and healthy activity, that's a big bonus.

We look forward to watching this event unfold this year and expect it to develop into another great local tradition.

As festival organizer Kacey Lloyd noted in announcing the new event, there's every reason to believe it will succeed.

"Berks County has an unmatched cycling tradition and a community that loves bike racing," she said. "Bringing high-level, high-speed racing to this community is a natural fit."