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**CHARITY CYCLING ADVENTURE FOREVER ETCHED IN AGENTS' MINDS**

Imagine an overseas trip that begins in the slums of Bangkok, sees you cycling 800 kilometres through anything from rubber plantations to prawn farms and ending at an orphanage in Phuket where a contingent of its children escort you into the town of Khao Lak to a hero's welcome.



Brisbane real estate agents Paul Moore and Jason Gegg have just returned from such a trip.

Mr Moore, a Principal of LJ Hooker Sunnybank Hills, and Mr Gegg, from the team's sales force, joined 25 other cyclists on the eight-day journey to raise money and awareness for the charity, *Hands Across the Water*

While the two describe the overall experience as 'awesome' and 'personally satisfying' and struggle to isolate any one emotional, sensorial or physical highlight, both agree the last few kilometres of the long trip were almost indescribable.

"To see around 30 of the orphanage's children on their little bikes waiting for us at a temple outside town – a temple that after the 2004 tsunami was littered with the bodies of thousands who had perished - then have them, along with police, escort us into town was something we had not prepared ourselves for," said Mr Moore.

"When we got into town, the community was out in force, there were banners of welcome, a band and the children sang Waltzing Matilda. I had tears."

"The fanfare was incredible. We were made to feel like royalty," Mr Gegg added.

The group, which included four Australian and one New Zealand LJ Hooker representatives, was mostly made up of non-serious cyclists. The youngest was just 11 years of age.

"Visiting the slums on our first evening as a group quickly put perspective on what we were doing it all for," Mr Gegg said.

"Then we were off, riding through plantations of all kinds, past rice paddies and across an air base built in war times, eating at roadside stalls and meeting the most wonderful Thai people."

*Hands Across the Water* founder and Chairman Peter Baines rode with the group. He founded the charity in 2005 after the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami

"One day the group was huddled outside our overnight accommodation in the pouring rain, not wanting to get on our bikes... but we did! It only took a few words from Peter to remind us what it was all about."

Mr Moore said the riders and their bikes were very well looked after throughout.

“Every day was different. I don’t think there is an experience not etched in my mind but one of the earliest is meeting Pradeep who since the age of 16, after only four years of formal education, has devoted her life to teaching the children of the slums. We also saw one of her teaching ‘farms’ where young boys who might otherwise be on a path to crime are taught about crops and stock.

“On our final night in Phuket we dined at La Meridien Beach Resort, where any family and friends who had travelled to Thailand joined us. Peter Baines also invited all the schools' and orphanage’s children, staff and volunteers, and to our great surprise we were guests at the wedding of a young woman, a key worker, who had lost her first husband and family in the tsunami.”

Each cyclist raised a minimum of \$10,000 for ‘Hands’ to join the ride.

Mr Moore, the LJ Hooker network’s ‘Hall of Fame’ auctioneer added an extra \$2000 on the ride itself by auctioneering a distinctive ‘Hands’ cycling shirt signed by every rider in the group

The money raised through each ‘Hands’ cycling journey is 100 per cent used to fund the continuing running costs of the orphanages and other projects supported by the charity, such as medical centres, development programs and education scholarships. No money raised goes to cyclist’s personal outlay or the charity’s administrative costs.

“We looked at the orphanage children and knew nothing could ever replace the loss of their families but the opportunities they are given through the work of Peter Baines and ‘Hands’ – the work we have had the opportunity to contribute to – have incredible and far-reaching impacts on these children’s lives and their communities,” said Mr Moore.

For more information, contact Paul Moore on 0411 727 877 or Jason Gegg on 0411 424 532. You can view photos of the ride at the LJ Hooker Sunnybank Hills web site, [www.ljhooker.com.au/sunnybankhills](http://www.ljhooker.com.au/sunnybankhills). You can also visit [www.handsacrossthewater.org.au](http://www.handsacrossthewater.org.au).

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