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**ROMANCE AT END OF RIDE**

At the end of a gruelling 8-day, 800km ride to raise money for children orphaned in the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, LJ Hooker Mandurah Principal Mitch Watt proposed to his partner of four years and colleague Jennifer Alford.

Mr Watt had just completed the 2011 Bangkok to Khao Lak charity bike ride with Ms Alford's 16-year old son Zack and 46 other cyclists from throughout Australia and New Zealand.

"In my mind, before I left I thought what better time to propose to Jennifer than when we reunited at the end of the ride to meet the kids at the orphanage."



Mr Watt said that Ms Alford was completely startled and thrilled by the proposal.

"Because we've been together so long, it was a bit of a surprise for her but she said yes straight away and I was relieved. We're looking at getting married in September this year," he said.

Both Mr Watt and Zack raised \$10,000 each and in total the 48 riders raised in excess of \$500,000 to help pay for the Suthasinee Orphanage at Yasothon and the completion of a medical and community centre at Baan Nam Khem.

"Each of the riders funded their own personal expenses to get to Thailand and participate in the ride. Not one cent of donations was spent on the riders' expenses, or the administration costs of the charity or any fundraising expenses. Every cent went directly to the kids and the projects that Hands Across the Water have undertaken," Mr Watt said.

Hands Across the Water, the charity hosting the ride, was founded by Australian Peter Baines to build an orphanage following the 2004 natural disaster. Mr Baines was a forensic detective with the Australian Police Force who assisted with the aftermath of the Bali Bombings and again with the Boxing Day Tsunami. He worked in Thailand as part of the response team following the Tsunami.

When describing the ride, Mr Watt said that the riders departed at 7.30am each day and would ride a set distance for the day that generally coincided with hotel locations. He said that on most days the riders were off the road by 3pm but one day they were riding till 5.30pm.

"The longest day was 128km and the toughest day was Day 7, which was 105 km but pretty much all hills. Then on Day 8, it was only 55km but we ended the ride with a 4km hill.

"I'm reasonably fit so it (the ride) wasn't that bad. A couple of people struggled and there was a couple of fall offs. As the ride progressed it got progressively harder."

"The new orphanage had just been completed when we rode in on 26 January. It was a great sight to see and a wonderful reminder of why we did the ride. It is good to know that we've helped children who are in need."

**ENDS**

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