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Alum Plans Cross-Country Cycle for Importance of Youth Mentors

Winthrop University

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Alum Plans Cross-Country Cycle for Importance of Youth Mentors

Quick Facts

- Willis will bike 3,714 miles in 78 days, from San Diego to Charlotte, beginning March 26.
- Her non-profit organization, I Dream in Colors, provides positive life experiences and mentors to youth.



CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA — Some people may call **Janiva Willis '05, '08**, crazy. She's OK with that.

"I admire Steve Jobs, who said it takes crazy people to change the world," said Willis, a former Winthrop University softball star. "If I have to be called crazy to make a difference in the lives of our youth, then I'll accept that gladly."

Willis, the executive director of non-profit **I Dream in Colors**, will take on her "craziest" challenge yet on March 26 with the **Dream Challenge Tour**. Willis will literally cycle across the United States—from San Diego, California, to Charlotte, North Carolina. If you need perspective, that's a total of **3,714 miles in 78 days**, all for a good cause: to raise money for and awareness of the importance of mentors in the lives of youth.

There are multiple ways to support Willis on her tour:
***Social Media:** Follow the action on social media with the hashtag #dreamchallengetour and #samsac. Send encouraging messages or take a picture/video of yourself doing a physical activity.

***Become a Dream Builder:** Purchase a Dream Challenge Tour T-shirt or other gear to show your

support.

Charlotte-based TV station WCCB will live stream daily updates from the tour. Willis will also keep her audience posted with blog posts.

During the trip, she will make stops at several cities along the way to host promotional pep rallies. On June 10, one of the last visits, she'll make a stop at the Winthrop Amphitheatre. Fellow cyclists are encouraged to join her for that last 30-mile stretch to Charlotte on June 11 through registering on the tour website.

Focus on character

Willis fondly remembers the treasured role mentors had in her life and hopes to instill that same trait in today's youth with her non-profit organization, **I Dream in Colors**. After years in the social work industry, she had started looking for other ways to help children. One day, she had a vision of a non-profit which would incorporate comprehensive programs using evidence-based theories on mentoring youths. The organization would provide positive life experiences, specifically to youth from

economically disadvantaged backgrounds or in need of additional academic and life support.

“It’s not just about being the best player on the field,” Willis explained. “It’s also about your character and what you do off the field that helps you land that scholarship or keeps you relevant in your industry or whatever career you choose....They have the dream, but they also need the guidance and support to get there.”

Cycling across the country struck her as an outstanding way to inspire hope for youth and communities while bringing attention to the organization and others like it in the area.

“It’s funny because I never once doubted or felt afraid of it,” she said. “It seemed like a no-brainer for me, cycling across the country.”

Willis joked that she appreciated the chance to get back in shape after years off of the softball field. But she grew serious when talking about the inspiration that youth in the I Dream in Colors program have given her.

“Just to see the look in their eyes when they look at me, and the words of encouragement they give to me, and even with sharing their dreams, it motivates me that much more,” she said. “Even on the bike now when I’m training and I have questions, saying, ‘Jay, are you sure?’ I see my kids and hear the voice of the things they say to me. It gives me the extra energy boost.”

Want to talk with Willis more about her inspirational trip? Contact **Nicole Chisari**, communications coordinator, [via email](#) or at 803/323-2236.

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