

Cyclists Set to Reach New Heights in Alleghany Highlands Return of Gran Fondo a cornerstone of new Alleghany Highlands Cycling Festival

For Immediate Release

Covington, Virginia Mar. 18, 2011 – Last July, over 100 cyclists from across the Mid-Atlantic tested the waters of a new cycling event with a new format in what was – for most of them – a new venue.

On Saturday, **July 9**, the second annual **Gran Fondo Alleghany Highlands** cycling event returns to Covington, Clifton Forge and Alleghany County, VA in a now-familiar format with the same elements that established its reputation: great scenery, friendly people and a challenging course.

On Sunday, **July 10**, a new event called the **Alleghany Mountain Challenge** will debut. This will be a sanctioned bicycle race over the 7.5-mile Warm Springs Mountain climb on Airport Rd., starting in Clifton Forge. There will be categories for Beginners, Pro/Am men, Masters (over age 40), Juniors (under age 18) and Women.

Both events are part of the new **Alleghany Highlands Cycling Festival**, two days of fun and challenge for cyclists of all abilities. Saturday's gran fondo event will have three route options for participants – of 30, 60 and 105-mile distances. A *gran fondo* – literally translated as “big endurance” from Italian - is a very popular format in Europe that can include up to 10,000 riders at the biggest events. Gran fondos are increasingly popular in the U.S., and the Gran Fondo Alleghany Highlands is one of a handful of such large events slated for the eastern U.S.; other gran fondos in 2011 are scheduled for New York City, Philadelphia and Miami.

“We’re committed to the format of the gran fondo because it’s inclusive and welcoming. The novice cyclist will line up with professional riders, very much like the ‘weekend warriors’ line up with the world’s elite at the New York Marathon,” says Matthew Butterman of event organizer SportVista, LLC. “By adding the Alleghany Mountain Challenge to the schedule on Sunday, we give our guests another chance to experience the splendor and spectacle of the Alleghany Highlands region, increase the exposure for our municipal and corporate sponsors, and further announce to the world what a wonderful outdoor destination the Alleghany Highlands region is.”

Sponsors of the 2011 Alleghany Highlands Cycling Festival include Ntelos, MeadWestvaco, HCA Virginia Health System, Roanoke Outdoors and the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce, in addition to monetary and staff support from the City of Covington, Town of Clifton Forge, and Alleghany County.

“We’re grateful for and proud of our local municipalities and businesses for coming together to support this event that so uniquely and effectively announces what a great locale the Alleghany Highlands is for a visit, or to live and do business in,” says Teresa Hammond, AH Chamber Executive Director.

For more information on the event, please visit the event website at www.sport-vista.com, or www.alleghanygranfondo.com.