

Home

News & Features

Local News

National

Mideast

International

Obits

Arts

Beltway

Mideast Report

Jewish World

Opinion

Celebrations

Sports

Synagogues and Chavurot

The Guide to Jewish Life

Advertising

Info

Submissions

Search

Feedback

Subscription

Reader Survey

[home](#) : [news & features](#) : [local news](#)

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

4/12/2007 6:30:00 AM

[Email this article](#) • [Print this article](#)

'Wear a helmet' Local Jewish bikers club takes to the road

by Gabe Ross

WJW Intern

With the wind in their faces and a concerned mother's voice in their ears, Jewish motorcyclists are taking to the open roads, looking for a good time and a little excitement.

"I get on my bike and I just ride down some country road someplace and I'm at peace with the world," said Jay Rubin, 55, of Falls Church, president and founder of The Tribe Motorcycle Club.

Later this month, The Tribe will be adding a religious ritual, coming together for the first Traveler's Prayer for Motorcyclists, an event that the data analyst hopes to make annual.

Rubin said he got the idea from Christian motorcycle clubs, some of which annually bless their bikes. "Of course, us as Jews don't bless material things, but there is a Traveler's Prayer," he said.

Rabbi Sarah Meytin, the Jewish Community Relations Council's assistant director, will lead the April 22 event outside Coleman's Power Sports in Falls Church.

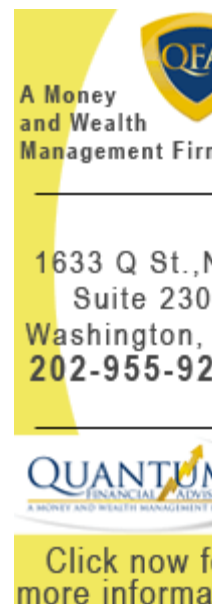
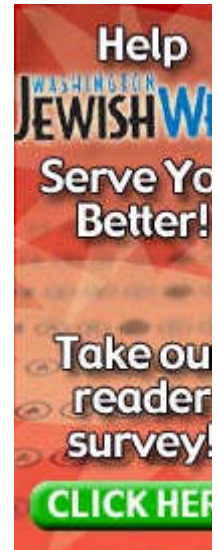
"I thought it was a really neat idea, I think the Travel Prayer is a ritual that many people don't know about or think about," said Meytin. "I love this idea of this group of specifically Jewish riders ... blessing their travels in a Jewish way."

Rubin met Meytin after volunteering for a phone bank where she was also working, and asked her to perform the blessing. Meytin's father-in-law is a bike rider, so she was an easy sell.

Of course, there'll be no wine on hand. "We'll have grape juice instead of wine," said Rubin, who added that The Tribe has a strict no-alcohol policy.

"If somebody were to drink on one of our rides, we wouldn't allow them to continue to ride with us," he said.

Started in 2003, The Tribe has 42 dues-paying members and boasts a busy social calendar, bringing together other members of the tribe who share the need for speed.



Fairfax's Louis Caplan, a computer scientist for the Department of Defense, has had a longtime affinity for motorcycles. "When I was young, I kept looking at them," said The Tribe vice president, who goes by the nickname "The Admiral" because he is always inspecting the fleet of bikes.

After graduating from college, Caplan, 37, took a course and bought a bike. He said his mom did not worry too much. "Her only comment was 'wear a helmet,' " he said.

Caplan, who also works part time as a motorcycle instructor, finds that when he's on his bike, he's able to "kind of let all the worries go by, just focus on riding and enjoying the here and now and not worry about what's coming, just for a short time anyway."

Bethesda's Barry Pokrass, 63, echoes that sentiment.

"You just get a sense of euphoria, it's a sense of freedom being out in the open," said the human resources consultant. "Once you get that in your blood, you don't want to give that up."

But, unlike that legendary duo in Easy Rider, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, who threw away their watches in order to be free from any such man-made constraints, he has kept his watch.

"I still like to know what time it is," said Pokrass, who added that "I'm a diabetic so I need to eat pretty regular meals."

He joined The Tribe because he enjoys getting together with fellow riders. "The added camaraderie of being Jewish is another element," he said.

Rubin said this desire to bond with fellow Jewish bikers motivated him to found the club.

"I was tired of going to motorcycle rallies and seeing church services, but nothing for the Jewish motorcycle rider," he said. Calculating that the Jewish population of the U.S. was roughly 2 percent, Rubin "figured out there should be a lot more Jewish riders out there."

After placing an ad in the Washington Jewish Week, Rubin received nine responses. WJW also ran an article on The Tribe after the club was formed, which led to a few more members. The Tribe has continued to grow from there.

For Manassas resident Betsy Ahrens, who has no family in the area, The Tribe provides a link to other Jews. "It's become a way of life for me and ... to combine my two loves, it's just awesome," she said.

"We're all Jews first and bikers second," said Ahrens, who works mornings with children with special needs at Osbourne Park High School in Manassas and in the afternoon and evening for Bae Systems in their semiconductor facility in Manassas.

A motorcycle rider for 25 years, the 60-year-old grandmother credits her ex-husband with putting her in the driver's seat. "One day, he had the nerve to tell me women shouldn't ride a bike, and from that day on I never sat on the back of another man's motorcycle," said Ahrens, who regularly travels between 70 and 80 miles per hour when she's "slabbin" it on the freeway.

Though she was a rare sight when she first revved up her engine, Ahrens said that, these days, a healthy number of women ride motorcycles. The Tribe's secretary, she dismissed any connection her gender has with her duties. "It's

not because I'm a woman, trust me. I actually volunteered for the job when I became a member," she recalled.

Though her children are not thrilled with her riding, Ahrens said her grandkids think it's "awesome."

Other family members find it to be a real source of pride as well. "It's a great way to celebrate Judaism, I don't even know how to put it into words," said Courtney Talmoud, whose husband, Ben, 40, a mechanic, rides a motorcycle. Talmoud and her daughter, Abbie, became dues-paying members of The Tribe as well this year to support the group, though neither rides motorcycles.

"I can't let her < she's 6," explained Talmoud, who added that Abbie "likes to sit on the bikes when they're not started."

Abbie's fellow students were thrilled when her dad rode his bike in their Purim parade at the Hebrew Day School of Montgomery County in Silver Spring. "Abbie, your abba was in the parade," Talmoud recounted them exclaiming. "It's a really big deal."

Ben Talmoud insisted he has no reservations about letting Abbie ride when she gets older. "If she wants to ride it, that's fine, but I'd have to teach her," he said. "If you don't know how to ride it, you're going to kill yourself."

Though some of the parents were surprised that Courtney Talmoud encouraged her husband's pursuit, she insisted that The Tribe takes all sorts of precautions. There's "helmet safety and this safety and that safety," she said, adding that she even got an e-mail from one of The Tribe members after her husband once failed to ride with the requisite leather jacket.

Henry Winokur, The Tribe's treasurer, said that he always exercises caution, never venturing out to ride without his protective suit. "If it's too hot or too cold to wear my suit, it's too hot or too cold to ride," he said.

"My favorite time to ride is when there is no precipitation and the temperature is between 60-75," said the Bethesda resident, who added that "it's not only fun, but it's economical."

"I get decent gas mileage since my motorcycle is only carrying me ... it's relatively speaking a low-pollution vehicle," said Winokur, who runs a one-man computer consultant company and is also an instructor for the MVA's motorcycle safety program.

"One of the things we teach is that [with] motorcycling, there's a risk in it. Can the risk be handled? Yes, it can," said Winokur, 55.

There are no guarantees, though. "Every now and then I scare the crap out of myself," he admitted.

And, of course, the Traveler's Prayer gathering later this month will be a prayer for continued safe travels.

The Tribe is also affiliated with the Jewish Motorcycle Association, which has more than 20 clubs worldwide.

"The JMA sponsors a ride to remember every year and it's usually around the time of Yom Hashoah," said Rubin. Last year, more than 300 motorcyclists from around the world converged on Whitwell, Tenn., which is home of the Paper Clip Project. Started by middle school students in 1998, the Paper Clip Project sought to collect 6 million paper clips to help the teenagers grasp the

enormity of the Holocaust. A documentary later told the story of their successful project.

"They just opened up their arms and hearts to us all," said Rubin of the town's reaction to the Jewish speedsters. "We went into the gym and they started pounding on the bleachers: 'J-M-A, J-M-A!' "

Rubin rode to Tennessee with an Israeli flag on his bike. It was, he said, "one of the most moving experiences I've ever had in my life."

Article Comment Submission Form

Please feel free to comment on this article.

Reader comments are not posted immediately to the Web site. Each submission must be approved by the Web site editor, who may edit content for appropriateness. There may be a delay of 24-48 hours for any submission while the web site editor reviews and approves it.

Note: All information on this form is required. Your telephone number is for our use only, and will not be attached to your comment.

Name:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Passcode: This form will not send your comment unless you copy exactly the passcode seen below into the text field. This is an anti-spam device to help reduce the automated email spam coming through this form.



Please copy the passcode exactly
- it is case sensitive.

Message:

Submit

Clear Form



Copyright 2007, Washington Jewish Week
11426 Rockville Pike Suite 236, Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 230-2222
Software © 1998-2007 1up! Software, All Rights Reserved