

Jewish Chronicle

The Wisconsin

Vol. XXVIII, No. 16

April 22, 2005 • 13 Nissan 5765

www.jewishchronicle.org

\$1.00 Per Issue

Jewish bikers to meet in D.C. to mark Holocaust

By Michael Shapiro

West Palm Beach, Fla. (JTA)

— This Torah's journey is not complete.

Written in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1929, the Torah was used secretly in Germany during the Holocaust before making its way largely unscathed to Jerusalem during the late 1930s.

Now, the sacred scroll is being prepared for a unique trip in May to mark Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, 60 years after the end of the Holocaust and World War II.

Recalling the annual pilgrimage thousands of Vietnam veterans make during Memorial Day weekend to honor their fallen and unaccounted-for brothers, the Jewish Motorcyclists Alliance, a loosely knit association of the most active Jewish motorcycle clubs along the East Coast and Canada, will hold its first-ever "Ride to Remember" over the week leading up to the May 5 observance.

The Torah, secured in a special carrying case attached to Rabbi Zach Betesh's Harley-Davidson, will accompany what organizers hope will be several hundred riders as they roll proudly into Washington to honor the memory of the Jews who died during the Holocaust. Betesh will then bring it back to Florida.

The bikers want to remember those Jews who were murdered by the Nazis while showing the world that Jews have survived and are free to pursue their passions, especially those not normally associated with Jews.

"Remarkably, we are bringing attention to this day," said Jeff Mustard, the founder and president of the South Florida-based King David



King David Bikers' president, Jeff Mustard, left, and Rabbi Zachery Betesh prepare to ride with fellow members in Boca Raton in April 2004. Photo courtesy of Jeff Mustard.

Bikers. "This is important. We have the power to do that by virtue of breaking stereotypes."

"It makes a statement," said Mel Morris of Hillel's Angels, a club based in northern New Jersey. "It gets rid of a stereotypical image."

Jews from all walks of life — doctors, lawyers, marketing executives, accountants, rabbis and truck drivers — will strap on their riding gear and mount their bikes to ride from as far away as Florida and Toronto to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

'Active faith'

The King David Bikers, led by Mustard and Betesh, an associate rabbi with Chabad Lubavitch of Fort Lauderdale, who serves as the spiritual leader of the motorcycle club, will leave on its 1,000-mile journey from the Miami Beach Holocaust Memorial and ride to Washington.

During the trip north, Mustard is planning stops in Jacksonville, Fla., Charlotte, N.C., and Roanoke, Va.,

to meet with people from the local Jewish communities. He hopes to find other riders to join in their journey.

Meanwhile, the Toronto-based Yidden on Wheels Motorcycle Touring Group will leave the Toronto Holocaust Memorial and ride 500 miles south.

With shorter distances to travel, the Washington-based Tribe Motorcycle Club, the New York based Chai Riders and Hillel's Angels will meet up with the Florida and Toronto contingents in northern Virginia on Thursday, May 5, for dinner. Yom HaShoah falls on Friday, May 6, but most people will observe it on Thursday to avoid interfering with Shabbat preparations.

The next morning the motorcyclists will ride out to East Coast Harley-Davidson in Dumfries, Va.

From there they will begin their solemn 25-mile ride to the Holocaust Museum.

That night, during Shabbat services, Betesh will read from his

special Torah, which he bought just a few weeks ago to bring on the ride as a way honor the memory of his late mother.

Coming together for this ride "recalls the souls that are not forgotten by showing our active faith," said Betesh, who will ride his 2002 Ultra Classic Harley, outfitted with a mezuzah and Hebrew inscription "Harley Ben David," or in English, "Harley-Davidson."

Members of the riding clubs said they have made long lasting friends and reconnected to Judaism by combining their passion for riding motorcycles with their desires to spend time with friends and help their local communities.

"Riding a motorcycle is a great feeling of freedom," Betesh said. "And when we do it together, it's even better."

That was the belief last fall when the leaders of the U.S.-based clubs met at Mike's Famous Harley-Davidson on I-95 at the foot of the Delaware Memorial Bridge. They were looking to make connections with others who have similar interests and to see if they could expand their various local efforts, including charity work, to a larger scale.

Money raised by the ride will be donated to the Holocaust museum and the Friends of the IDF, a group dedicated to supporting the Israeli army.

"The ride is bringing people together, Jewish motorcyclists together," Betesh said. "This will let people know that we will never forget."

For registration information and trip itineraries, go to www.kingdavidbikers.com.