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Ride to honor cyclists killed by motorists

By Michael Gossie
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Eric Hirning of Gilbert organized this year's Ride of Silence. The ride, with a police escort, is to draw attention to the number of cyclists killed by motorists every year.

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Several years ago, avid bicyclist Eric Hirning was out for a ride when he was struck by a vehicle.

"I was fortunate enough to walk away from the accident," the Mesa man said. "There are many others who are not as fortunate. It seems that most of the bike safety information out there is for the cyclists, not the drivers."

To honor the memory of those cyclists who have not been as fortunate as Hirning, he is helping to organize Sunday's Ride of Silence in Mesa, part of a worldwide effort in which cyclists will participate in a silent slow-paced ride - maximum speed of 12 mph - in honor of those who have been injured or killed while cycling on public roadways. Chris Phelan organized the first Ride Of Silence in Dallas in 2003 after endurance cyclist Larry Schwartz was killed by a passing bus mirror on an empty road.

Hirning said organizers hope to accomplish several goals through today's ride:

To mourn - in funeral procession style - those cyclists already killed by motorists.

To raise awareness among motorists, law enforcement officials and lawmakers that cyclists are on the road.

To help motorists understand that cyclists only want to share the road they ride on.

To show that cyclists are not going away.

"I think it's important for all cyclists to attend this ride because there is absolute strength in numbers," Hirning said. "When drivers are out (today) and are driving home from work or wherever and see this long string of cyclists, they are going to take notice."

And statistics show that drivers need to take notice. In 2007, 698 bicyclists were killed and an additional 44,000 were injured in traffic crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In Arizona, 21 cyclists were killed in 2007, and the state's average of 3.31 cyclists killed per million population is the eighth-highest fatality rate in the nation.

"Motorists need to realize that we share the road with them and have the same rights," Hirning said. "But on that same note, cyclists also have to obey the same laws as vehicles. I think that's where cycling gets a bad rap. 'You cyclists can just blow through a stop sign' is a comment I hear all the time. Yes, many do. That doesn't make it right. We cyclists have a responsibility, too."

Part of the responsibility for keeping the cyclists safe today will rest with Phoenix Metro Traffic, which will provide a motorcade escort service for participants in the Ride of Silence.



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