

# *THE PRINCETON PACKET*

## **Event aims at saving cyclists' lives**

DATE POSTED: Monday, May 7, 2012 7:05 PM EDT

By Shannon Arnold, Special Writer

Pay attention next Wednesday evening to the line of cyclists with the police escort traversing local roadways.

In honor of cyclists injured or killed while riding, the 10th annual Ride of Silence is scheduled to take off at 7 p.m. May 16 from two area locations. The Skillman ride will depart from Van Horne Park (behind Princeton Fitness and Wellness Center, 1225 State Road, Princeton) and a West Windsor ride will take off from the Municipal Complex parking lot, 271 Clarksville Road, West Windsor.

A symbolic funeral procession to raise awareness of the inherent danger to cyclists everywhere, the Ride of Silence is conducted in communities from all 50 states and across all seven continents.

Bicycle safety is an important issue, says West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Association president Jerry Foster, who added, "The great news is that it's improving, from 1,003 fatalities in 1975 to 618 fatalities in 2010, according to federal data. That said, 618 fatalities is 618 too many."

Mr. Foster adds that there is a statewide push to increase consciousness and consideration for cyclists on the roadways.

"NJ DOT Commissioner (James) Simpson is sponsoring an initiative toward Zero Fatalities, featuring Complete Streets policies to improve roadway safety, since all roadway users must be accommodated when a road project is implemented. We're happy to report that West Windsor now enjoys Complete Streets policies at all levels of government responsible for our roads – state, county and municipal," he explains.

The Ride of Silence is another initiative to further that cause.

The event first was organized in 2003, by a Dallas rider named Chris Phelan in honor of his friend, endurance cyclist Larry Schwartz, who died from injuries sustained in his collision with the mirror of a passing bus. Heather Haggan of Skillman has participated in the ride since its inception in the area.

"I led the first Ride of Silence out of the Montgomery/Princeton area in 2007," she explains. "I became involved through a friend of mine that knew about the ride

and she asked me to lead a ride from my local community.”

Since that first ride five years ago, attendance has grown, and anyone can join the ride before it embarks. The more cyclists in the procession, the better chances that drivers will notice and exercise caution when operating their vehicles near those biking on the roadways.

”We are still a relatively small ride when compared to some other states and cities, let alone throughout the world, but I feel that we are gaining momentum in the community,” she explains.

”There has been such great progress in the last few years with towns adding bicycle lanes and creating organizations to help motorists understand that cyclists are permitted to ride on the roadway as long as they are obeying the same traffic laws that motor vehicles must,” Ms. Haggan adds. “Likewise, many bike clubs have begun promoting road safety classes and teaching their cyclists the importance of obeying the laws that apply to the roadways.”

”The Ride of Silence is an important way to raise awareness,” says Mr. Foster. “We’re happy to enjoy the support of West Windsor’s mayor, police and township council.”

While there are no sponsorship or registration fees, local businesses and community members are also extremely supportive of the ride and its mission.

”As a result of this support, West Windsor was named New Jersey’s first Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists, at the Bronze level: the only NJ municipality so far to earn the designation at any level,” Mr. Foster adds.

The Skillman ride is supported by the local community as well.

The local police have always been very supportive and, barring any emergencies, they will escort the ride,” he said. “This really helps a lot because it draws attention to the cause and, in the end, the more people paying attention to cyclists, the better off we will all be.”

Ms. Haggan adds, “We are not sponsored by any local businesses or nonprofits because, by the design of the Ride of Silence organization, this is a free event worldwide. The idea is that the cause is so important, we want anyone to be able to participate. I think the most important message cyclists are trying to promote through this ride is to share the road.”

Those who wish to learn more about the cause or contribute can do so by visiting [www.rideofsilence.org](http://www.rideofsilence.org). Cyclists interested in participating should be at their respective locations 15 minutes prior to the start of the ride.