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## **As bicycle ridership grows, Phila. tells scofflaws: Stop!**

**And look. And signal. An effort by police and a coalition hopes to prevent tragedies, like the two recent deaths.**

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Kirsten Gwynn has no memory of the moment she was hit by a bicyclist while jogging last month along Boathouse Row. When she tries to picture it, all she sees is a bike tire. The bystanders calling 911, the ambulance rushing her to intensive care, the doctor telling her she had a skull fracture? All a blank.

Gwynn was in Hahnemann University Hospital for three days and bedridden for weeks after she returned to her Center City apartment.

Gwynn, 25, a nursing student at the University of Pennsylvania, who expects to graduate next month, struggles with dizzy spells, hearing loss, and, if she moves too quickly, a sensation that her brain is "jumbled."

But she feels lucky things weren't worse. At least two Philadelphia residents died last month after cyclists hit them: Tom Archie, 78, who was struck by a bicyclist going the wrong way down a street in South Philadelphia, and Andre Steed, a 40-year-old paralegal, whom police found bleeding on the ground at 16th and Locust Streets after an apparent collision with a bike.

"I still can't believe this happened to me," Gwynn said. "This was something I never even thought of as a possibility. But no matter how bad it gets for me and how frustrated I am, I'm back to normal life for the most part."

More people are biking in Philadelphia than ever, according to the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. More than 11,000 people pedal to work on a typical day, and an estimated 36,000 make that trip by bike at least once a month, the coalition's bike counts of 2008 showed.

But the growing biking population has also brought more rogue cyclists who don't follow traffic laws and can cause accidents.

And unlike reckless drivers, bike scofflaws typically get off free. They often flee accidents, and though police can issue tickets for violations, they almost never do. Philadelphia police wrote just 14 tickets to bicyclists last year, compared with more than 200,000 to drivers.

"Are we as diligent about it as we should be? Probably not," Philadelphia Sgt. Ray Evers said. "But we have to prioritize. We can't even stop every car violation we see."

Police are hoping to change that, at least for a few hours, when they launch an effort to inform cyclists of the laws of the road. In the next few weeks, officers from the Ninth Police District, which includes Rittenhouse Square and much of Center City, will flood the area to write tickets. Members of the Bicycle Coalition are expected to be there to hand out information about responsible biking.

"I've always received complaints," said Philadelphia Capt. Dennis Wilson of the Ninth District. "People get so fed up that I've had patrolmen get yelled at for biking on the sidewalk."

Bicyclists are bound by the same laws as drivers. They are supposed to stop at lights and stop signs and to signal before turning. On roads that don't have a bike lane, cyclists are supposed to keep to the right when possible. Drivers are supposed to treat bicycles as cars and to stay out of bike lanes, except when making a turn. And in Philadelphia, only children 12 and younger may legally ride on sidewalks.

In reality, cyclists often zip along sidewalks, weave between cars, and speed the wrong way on busy streets. Some bike messengers and others ride bikes with fixed gears and no brakes.

Some cyclists consciously flout the rules, but many are unaware of them, said Breen Goodwin, educational director for the Bicycle Coalition.

"A lot of people don't understand that a bike is a legal motor vehicle, whether you're a motorist who's annoyed that you're stuck behind a bike or whether you're a cyclist who's riding on the sidewalk because you feel safer there," Goodwin said.

The city has worked in recent years to accommodate the growing number of bicyclists. The addition of bike lanes on Pine and Spruce Streets has more than doubled the bicycles there, according to the coalition, and many bikers say the corridors have been made safer for cyclists and motorists alike.

Goodwin said she believed stronger enforcement of traffic laws would have an impact on irresponsible bikers.

"If a cyclist runs a red light, they should be stopped," she said. "A huge part of

this is just educating people and teaching everyone that if you give respect, you'll get respect."

Police don't keep data on how many people are hit by bicyclists, largely because combing through the city's thousands of injury reports would be extremely difficult, they said. But anecdotal evidence from people who have reported a wide variety of injuries suggests the accidents are relatively common.

Gwynn doesn't know what caused the cyclist to strike her from behind Oct. 14. By the time passersby called 911, the cyclist was long gone.

"If it was an honest mistake," she said, "I can't understand why they wouldn't have stopped and waited until an ambulance got there."

Gwynn suffered a skull fracture and internal bleeding. Blood and spinal fluid leaked from an ear, causing her to lose all hearing in her right side. She has since regained some hearing, and doctors have said all of it may return.

Fatal accidents between pedestrians and cyclists seem to be much rarer, last month notwithstanding. The police are not aware of any such death last year and said it had happened just once in 2007.

Steed, the paralegal hit Oct. 15 at 16th and Locust, also was abandoned by the cyclist who knocked him down. Witnesses told police that they had heard a crash and had seen a cyclist picking himself up after apparently hitting Steed, who died from head injuries 10 days later.

If found, the cyclists who hit Gwynn and Steed could be charged with leaving the scene of an accident. Theoretically, cyclists could be charged with manslaughter, depending on whether they were intoxicated or on other circumstances. That scenario would be unprecedented, however, and it would be up to the District Attorney's Office to file charges.

Archie was hit Oct. 8 at Passyunk Avenue and Pierce Street. Heather McCarron, his niece, said Archie had been preparing to cross Passyunk and was watching for traffic coming from his right. The bicyclist who hit him was pedaling against traffic, from the other direction. He told police that he had yelled at the last minute, but too late.

Archie was taken to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital with a massive blood clot and bleeding on the brain. He never regained consciousness, and doctors told the family that Archie was essentially brain dead.

"At first, we kept thinking there's got to be something more to this," McCarron said. "My uncle was in perfect health. He was fine. And then he was hit by a bike."

Two weeks later, Archie's condition had worsened, and his family took him off life support.

"The doctors told us that if my uncle had been in his 20s, he might have had a chance at recovery," McCarron said. "Might have."

The cyclist stopped after the accident. He sent a plant and a "beautiful" letter to Archie's wife, McCarron said, expressing his regrets. He has not been charged.

"I know it was an accident, but I guess I'm angry with the situation," McCarron said. "I'm angry with the entitlement, the feeling that it's OK to go the wrong way down the street. If he was doing what he was supposed to be doing, he would have been on the other side of the street. My uncle would have seen him."

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