



RIDE OF SILENCE • PLANIT STYLE, INSIDE

Biking community gathers for ride to remember



Gerry Bokema

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This one's for Gerry.

When Jim Gould, an instructor at McHenry County College, rides his bike Wednesday, he'll be thinking about his brother-in-law, Gerry Bokema.

Bokema was 53 years old when he was struck and killed while riding a bicycle. It was the Sunday morning of Memorial Day weekend in 2008, and a driver, just off a long night shift, fell asleep at the wheel.

The driver veered onto the shoulder of the road, hitting and killing Bokema instantly.

Since then, Gould has joined other bicyclists in honor of Bokema and others killed while riding bikes.

"The idea is it really is a silent ride of memory," Gould said.

While a Ride of Silence has been hosted nationally for the past 10 years, with Gould previously participating in other rides throughout the Chicago area, McHenry County first joined the cause last year.

The McHenry County Bicycle Advocates will host its second Ride of Silence beginning at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the McHenry Metra parking lot.

Members of the group, Gould and anyone else interested will ride silently for about an hour, or 6 or 7 miles, in memory of those killed or injured while bicycling, and also to raise awareness of bicycle safety.

"Bicycles are equal road users," said Eber-

hard Veit, president of McHenry County Bicycle Advocates. "If we respect each other and give each other space, we're all better off."

"I think the real story behind (the ride) is awareness and that there's a growing amount of people that use bicycles and alternative transportation, and that the roads have to accommodate everybody."

One of the ride's main messages is motorists should keep a distance of at least 3 feet from bicyclists as a buffer, he said.

"Most people give space, but it's a regular occurrence that it's tight," he said.

Nationally, the Ride of Silence began in Dallas after an endurance cyclist, Larry Schwartz, was hit and killed by the mirror of a passing bus. It is estimated at least 700 bicyclists are killed by motorists every year.

There are at least 321 confirmed rides throughout the United States this year.

Last year's McHenry County Ride of Silence drew about 25 bicyclists, and organizers are hoping for more this year.

Bicyclists are expected to travel as a group from the Metra parking lot, down a trail to Petersen Park, to Route 31, to Pearl Street, through downtown McHenry, to Green Street, across to the Prairie Trail and back to the Metra lot.

A small trailer attached to a bicycle will hold a sign, announcing the reason for the ride to those passing by.

"We stay silent, and we stay together," Veit said.

Veit rides his bicycle to work almost daily and has encouraged others to do the same. He

and his group also work to promote the addition of bike paths throughout the area.

Veit especially seeks a path from Crystal Lake to Woodstock and is pushing for one with the reconstruction of Route 14 from McHenry County College to Woodstock.

"A lot of the communities are really making a good effort to improve connectivity within the communities," he said. "But it could be much better and safer and attractive to more people if the right infrastructure was there."

For Gould and others who've experienced similar losses, the ride represents a way to honor the memory of loved ones.

Bokema, who lived in Munster, Ind., and worked as an international partner in a Chicago law firm, traveled the world for his job. He would bike everywhere, even taking a fold-up bike with him on trips.

A serious biker, he always wore a helmet and highly visible clothing, Gould said. When he was killed, he left behind his wife, Jane, four grown children and a newborn grandson.

His family used his life insurance money to buy a bicycle shop in Homewood they renamed "Goodspeed Cycle" in Bokema's honor. Bokema's favorite phrase was, "Bicycling is a good speed to travel."

"Walking is too slow. Going by a field in a car is too fast. Bicycling is a good speed," Bokema would say.

"I think he would be very much in favor of [the Ride of Silence]," said Gould, who enjoys riding his bike, as well, "and letting people know that the road is a place to ride."



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Photos provided