



**THE CHAI RIDERS** – dedicated to the enjoyment of riding and doing good. Stuart Kaufman, Bob Nesoff, Scott Yacker, David Himber, Ari Kuperberg, Susan Roth, Alan Dvorkin, Mindy Dauber, Steve Kaplowitz and Lauren Secular.

# JEWISH BIKERS HIT THE ROAD

Chai Riders: Not exactly the Wild Bunch

BY BOB & SANDY NESOFF

It wasn't exactly the annual motorcycle rally in Sturgis, S.D. with thousands of bikers from across the country, but the dozen or so motorcycles lined up at the curb on Teaneck's Cedar Lane gave pause to passersby who cast nervous glances as they walked by.

Some gave a wide berth to the knot of men and a handful of women in leather jackets and vests festooned with club patches, navigating quickly around the group. One vested man, standing well over six feet tall, had his long, graying hair tied into a ponytail that hung to his shoulders; his arms were covered in colorful tattoos.

Closer inspection would have shown that the tattoos on David Himber's arms were nothing more than a colorful long-sleeved shirt made of stretch material deliberately designed to look like "tats." As an Orthodox Jew, Himber would never permit permanent ink on his skin.

More than that, it probably wouldn't go over too well for the dean of students at Yeshiva University to be inked up.

So what kind of motorcycle gang was this, standing in front of The Kosher Experience?

This "gang" includes educators, doctors, an accountant, dentists, computer techs, a rabbi, a novelist and several business people; hardly the makeup of a Marlon Brando movie about a hard-

riding motorcycle gang.

Chai Riders was holding its monthly dinner meeting and had chosen the Cedar Lane eatery for this gathering. With perhaps only one exception (the iconic Katz's Deli in New York) the club always meets at a kosher restaurant to accommodate the members who are observant. The club also frequents Smokey Joe's BBQ, also on Cedar Lane, periodically.

With nearly a third of its membership living in Bergen County, Chai Riders are a familiar sight on their HOGS (nothing to do with kosher; that's what they call Harley Davidson motorcycles), Honda Goldwings, VStar, Kawasaki and other bikes. The remain-



**SAFE TRAVEL** (Top left) David Himer and Lauren Secular on their bikes. Secular's license plate reads "Chai8" as well as Chai "18." (Middle left) Mindy Dauber shows off her Hamesh bracelet charm. (Bottom left) The Traveler's Prayer, laid upon the gas tank of David Himer's bike. (Above) David Himer.

der of the club resides in New Jersey and throughout New York's five boroughs and Long Island.

Harrington Park's Steve Kaplowitz is one of those who are up for a ride at the drop of a suggestion.

"I ride because it's about the ride rather than the destination," he says. "It's enjoying the travel along the way and the destination doesn't really matter. I love the day trips through winding

country roads on beautiful days.

"There is a 'thrill quotient,' but it's a combination of both the beauty and the risk involved. Only a motorcyclist can understand why a dog sticks his head out of a car window," Kaplowitz chuckles.

He joined Chai Riders several years ago because he enjoys sharing his riding experience with others.

"It's a safety thing for me," he says.

"I prefer not to ride alone and there is safety in numbers; cars tend to keep their distance when they see a line of motorcycles on the road."

He came to Chai Riders for much the same reason as many of the other members: the socialization, lack of internal organization politics and spending time with others who share his cultural background.

For Union County's Michael Costa,



Mindy Dauber and Lauren Secular ready to ride

belonging to Chai Riders is a horse of a different color.

"Why would a Christian join a Jewish motorcycle club?" asks the Catholic Costa. "I discovered that I felt comfortable around Jewish people."

The club's sole non-Jew, Costa was with some Jewish friends from another club he belonged to and became involved in the annual Ride to Remember (R2R) ride. The R2R commemorates the Holocaust and has a different destination city each year (this year was in Toronto) where there is a Holocaust program. The riders help raise money for that program and make a bold statement when hundreds of Jewish bikers cruise through the city.

At a recent R2R in Virginia Beach, Va., Costa was drafted to fill out a minyan for morning prayers and was decked out in tefillin for the first time in his life. Following prayers there was some minor consternation when someone pointed out that he was Catholic, a fact that he is proud of. He is also a member of the Christian Motorcycle Association.

Costa notes that his affinity for Jews could possibly come from his ancestry. He is of Portuguese descent and thinks there is a possibility that his ancestors may have been DaCosta. On his mother's side, the name was Lopes. Both had Jewish roots and may have been forced

to become "Conversos" during the Inquisition.

The club means far more than just weekend riding (except on shabbos) for the members. They participate in a wide range of activities.

When a group of students across the country attempted to force Trader Joe's chain to remove Israeli products from its shelves, the Chai Riders mounted a peaceful counter-protest. Bringing in members of other Jewish motorcycle groups and cage (auto) drivers from area synagogues, they descended on the Paramus Trader Joe's on Route 17 with a caravan of more than 50 motorcycles and cars in an impressive show of support.

The management of Trader Joe's had refused to go along with the boycott, and this was Chai Riders' method of expressing its appreciation. The Chai Riders purchased all the Israeli products, putting their pocketbooks where their ideals are.

The club eschews any political involvement except where the security and well-being of Israel in particular and Jews in general are at stake.

A number of members recently volunteered to ride Israeli women soldiers, who had been wounded or injured, on a ride to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

One of the more popular activities is

the club's annual ride to Liberty, N.Y., to Camp HASC (Hebrew Academy for Special Children), a haven for some 300 mentally and physically challenged youngsters.

The club members come in small groups from several locations and meet at a designated spot near the camp. From there they ride in a spectacular convey through the gates and to a field behind the living quarters. Campers and staff are excited to see the line of 30 or more roaring motorcycles riding up the narrow road through the camp.

Once the bikes have had an opportunity to cool off – for the safety of the campers – staff members bring the youngsters into the field and they are given the opportunity to sit on the bikes, pretending to be flying down the road. Chai Riders members have says the most gratifying aspect of the ride is the laughter and happy looks on the faces of campers as they sit astride the bikes.

Most of the bikes are worth tens of thousands of dollars (a new Goldwing can cost more than \$50,000) and the bikes can get messy during this activity, but there is never a complaint from any of the Chai Riders, who believe it is a mitzvah they would not miss.

There is also a solid contingent of Chai Riders for the annual Andiamo Run that raises money for a variety of

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worthwhile causes such as bullet-proof vests for police officers. The run begins at Andiamo Restaurant in Haworth with more than 1,000 motorcycles participating. It runs north on the Palisades Interstate Parkway, then back and over the George Washington Bridge, finally returning to Haworth. This is arguably the most impressive motorcycle run in New Jersey and takes place on Sept. 9 this year.

Chai Riders’ traditional season-opening ride in April is sponsored by Dr. Charlie Knapp, a Fair Lawn dentist. The Poker Run also raises funds for worthwhile causes.

In June, the club turns out in force for the Israel Day parade in New York with one of the biggest motorcycle contingents rolling down the road. The members proudly display American, Israeli and MIA flags on their bikes.

Social activities involving non-riding friends and family members are an



important part of Chai Riders. Annually, Kaplowitz puts together a block of tickets for the Brooklyn Cyclones, the Mets’ minor league baseball team in July. He combines that with a side trip to nearby Coney Island for a few quick runs on the Cyclone roller coaster.

Club president David Himer and his wife, Eileen, who live in the gated community of Seagate down the road from the baseball stadium and Coney Island, invite all participants to their home for a kosher barbecue.

Not all spouses ride. Some are there for the social activities while others ride pillion (back seat). Ridgewood’s Mindy Dauber puts it in perspective when she points at her husband and says, “We are a mixed marriage. I ride and he doesn’t.”

Chai Riders is about as far from Hell’s Angels as a motorcycle club can be. One of the requirements for all members, without exception, is that they must take a certified safety course at least every three years.

During rides, a Road Captain is responsible for taking the lead and ensuring that all precautions are taken. There is usually one person at the head of the line with a CB radio in his helmet

and an experienced rider at drag (the end of the line) also with a radio. They are in constant contact and if the line spreads out too far, they can pull it together. In the rare event of an accident, they have immediate communication with each other and can take appropriate action.

Not all members have flat bottoms from spending all their spare time on a bike. Several riders tally out between 20,000 and 30,000 annual miles, and others may rack up only a couple of hundred. They are accepted as much as the most avid rider.

Prizes are awarded at the annual Chanukah party for those who have compiled the most miles and the least. There is a trivia contest with prizes and trophies awarded, and hearty Gemütlichkeit with riders and spouses enjoying each other’s company.

Chai Riders is also a founding member of the Jewish Motorcycle Alliance (JMA), a coalition of Jewish biker clubs from throughout the United States and Canada, and a member of the American Motorcycle Alliance (AMA).

For more information about the Chai Riders, visit [chairiders.org](http://chairiders.org) and click on the “Welcome.”

