

Christina Genco Alabama Memorial Ride: June 3, 2012

By James Dawson (jadawson@hiwaay.net)

As an avid cyclist for almost three decades, the issue of cycling safety is one of my primary concerns. It is not just an issue that cyclists encounter when reading the newspaper or watching the evening news. As most cyclists already know all too well, riding the roads of Alabama means you will be buzzed (or worse) on a frequent basis. Regardless of whether you're strictly a recreational cyclist or a serious athlete preparing for competition, cyclists have a common interest in improving safety, and in particular, lowering the rate of traffic accidents caused by reckless motorists.

Motivated by these concerns, I have been very moved by the recent death of Christina Genco, who was struck and killed near my hometown of Fort Payne on June 6, 2011. The details of this tragedy are all too familiar, as they resemble similar recent cases in which cyclists around Huntsville have lost their lives, such as Sharon Bayler (2010), Carlos Serrano (2009), or Sarah Chapman (2008). In the case of Christina, she was traveling through Alabama as part of a coast-to-coast ride organized by Bike & Build, a non-profit organization that promotes the cause of affordable housing. Christina, a recent graduate of Boston University, was spending her summer with a group traveling from South Carolina to California, stopping to work on affordable housing at locations such as Greenville, SC, and Athens, GA. Christina's group was cycling a leg from Rome, GA, to Scottsboro, AL, en route to a work site in Decatur, AL, on the day she was struck by an SUV, the driver of which was reportedly looking in the rear view mirror when he drifted over onto the shoulder where she was riding near the top of Sand Mountain on Hwy 35.

The Christina Clarke Genco Foundation, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) organization led by Christina's mother Caroline Genco and others which aims to honor the memory of Christina. The foundation aims to promote mentoring for young adults, in particular women, through activities such as athletics and community service. There are three specific funds for (1) affordable housing, (2) safe biking, and (3) women's lacrosse scholarship. In partnership with with Bike Newton and Cycle Loft, the first annual Christina Clarke Genco Mother's Day Memorial Ride will be held on May 13, 2012, in Newton, MA, which is near Boston.

In order to show my support to the Genco family, I have registered for the ride in Newton, but regretfully conveyed to the organizers my inability to attend in person due to the long distance to Boston. I mentioned the idea of holding a ride in Alabama in order to help raise funds and honor Christina's memory. Christina's family was in favor of this and due to this encouragement I have put together such a ride. The Alabama ride will start near Fort Payne on June 3. The only cost to the riders is \$25 in the form of a donation to the Genco Foundation that I will collect. It is my hope that in addition to honoring Christina and raising funds for the Genco Foundation, this ride will also raise awareness among motorists for the need to pay more attention to driving to help protect the lives of the cycling public.

Riders will park and register at the Blake Community Center, 465 County Road 505, Fort Payne, AL 35968. This is on Sand Mountain, only a few miles from where Christina was struck. Registration starts at 7 a.m. on June 3. Riders will depart starting a 8:30 a.m. There are three options available. The first is

a 38 mile loop that stays on Sand Mountain and does not present any challenging terrain. The second option is an 80 mile loop that descends Sand Mountain and crosses the valley to Lookout Mountain and then passes through Desoto State Park and along the side of Little River Canyon before returning to Sand Mountain. The third option is a combination of the two loops for a grand tour with a total distance of 110 miles. Each loop will be supported by a rest stop about halfway through. Also, sag support, ride leaders, and course markings will be provided to aid participants. Lunch can be ordered during registration and will be available for riders to eat at the community center after completion of the ride. There is no on-line registration, however, anyone who plans to participate should send an email to James Dawson so that appropriate provisions can be obtained.

About 12 volunteers are needed to work this event. Volunteer roles include rider leaders (a total of 6), lead vehicle drivers (a total of 3), rest stop operators (at least 2), and a SAG driver (with a truck). Any and all help will be gladly received, including help with pre-event publicity so that the impact can be maximized.

Further info:

Organizer: James Dawson, 256-509-2388, jadawson@hiwaay.net

Fort Payne, AL, ride: <http://www.usacycling.org/events/index.php?event=2103&year=2012>

Boston, MA, ride: <http://www.usacycling.org/events/index.php?event=1396&year=2012>