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## Cyclists ride to remember a friend

About 240 participate in 29-mile trip that benefits David T. Ryan scholarship

By **ERIN DUGGAN**, Staff writer

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NISKAYUNA -- Scott Freeman knows firsthand how dangerous cycling can be when drivers aren't paying attention. When the 37-year-old Altamont resident was 15, he was hit on his bike by a car that never stopped.

Freeman's injuries were serious, but he escaped with about 100 stitches to his face and reconstructive surgery. He still bikes but has had drivers try to run him off the road and throw bottles at him.

"They think it's funny," Freeman said of the drivers who harass riders. "They're the main reason I wear a helmet."

Freeman was one of about 240 cyclists who rode 29 miles of road and bike trail in Schenectady and Saratoga counties on Saturday, raising money for scholarships and spreading bike awareness to drivers.

"We're making ourselves visible," said organizer Walter Chica. "We're reminding drivers the roadway isn't just for them."

Less than four months ago, David Ryan, 32, of Niskayuna was killed while biking the same 29-mile loop. Ryan, an avid cyclist, was hit on Riverview Road in Clifton Park. The driver, Joshua Paniccia, 18, of Niskayuna, has a history of speeding and drag racing, according to prosecutors. He faces charges of second-degree manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide, and has pleaded not guilty.


Ryan was one of two members of the Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club to be killed while riding on Saratoga County roads this summer. Bill Page, 79, died in August after his bike suddenly veered into Route 9 traffic, possibly caused by a tire blowout.

The club hosted Saturday's event, which raised funds for the David T. Ryan Scholarship Fund. The fund will award scholarships to local athletes who excel in science. General Electric, where Ryan worked, sponsored the event, donating food, water, security, tables and tents. GE also made a monetary donation to the fund, Chica said.


Bike safety is a national problem as speed limits are rising, larger sport utility vehicles take up more of the road and drivers still multitask behind the wheel. The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 500,000 cyclists are taken to emergency rooms each year after bicycle-related accidents, and more than 700 cyclists die as a result of those accidents.

Several bills to address bicycle safety are pending in the state Legislature but did not pass this year. One would require police to document helmet usage in bike accidents, and the helmets' impact on injuries. Another would authorize regional motorcycle, pedestrian and bicycle advisory councils.

Bill and Cheryl Gerstler brought their 3-year-old daughter Kaitlyn on the ride's shorter, 11-mile loop.

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"I think the Capital Region can definitely improve the areas available for bikers," said Bill Gerstler, a friend of Ryan's.

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