



## The BEST Reason For GWTA Membership

You'll never guess where I found the best reason for GWTA membership: a remembrance of a Chapter Director who recently died.

Now, you might be wondering, "Huh? What do you mean?" Let me share the context of my search for the best reason for GWTA membership: our retention. Seems that the retention level of organizations around the country has decreased as our economy has forced changes on people and families, and GWTA is no exception. So I wanted to write an article directed squarely to those folks who might be wondering about renewing their one-year, two-year or three-year memberships.

Executive Director Bruce Keenon keeps telling me that I have got to get out around the country to see how chapters are beyond Region A and Washington State. He tells me that my state and Region do things a bit differently than other parts of the country. And he's right: I do need to see how things happen in other parts of the country, because where I come from, my home chapter is growing like a weed, my state seems to have events every weekend, and the whole darn Region seems like one big fun house.

And I can't imagine why anyone wouldn't want to either join this kind of group, or renew their membership. And it's driving me crazy why we even have an issue about either recruitment or retention.

It was while pondering this issue that I stumbled upon an article in the newsletter of the Lawelatla Riders, Chapter L of the Washington State GWTA, out of Longview, Washington. I had been down to see them last January, promoting a photographic tour of the state that my home chapter puts on, as well as a public relations project for the state where we do escort duty for 7000 bicyclists who ride from Seattle to Portland (STP). While visiting Chapter L, I was pleased that their Chapter Director, Rich Wilson elected to participate in our "Wing Washington" project, and was also a strong supporter of the STP.

Rich passed away from cancer in March. The April newsletter had a nice message from Sharon Ackermann about Rich. Sharon talked about lots of trips, lots of dinner rides, lots of events and of watching their families grow up together. She said, "We all have wonderful memories that, unlike pages in a picture album, will never fade." Sharon goes on to say:

*"GWTA is what brought us together, and we will miss Rich at those meetings and rides. I recall being dragged kicking and screaming to my first GWTA meeting, because I was not going to be a 'Biker Babe' or belong to some 'motorcycle gang'. I now could not be prouder than I am as a member, because we have something no other club I belong to has. We are down to earth people doing down to earth things. Not only for our own enjoyment, but for the betterment of our community. We've been to places we would*

*never have gone to if not for the GWTA, and Rich Wilson will always be in our memories of those places.”*

Thank you, Sharon, for helping to crystallize what GWTA membership means to me, and for so many other people, too. *“We are down to earth people doing down to earth things. Not only for our own enjoyment, but for the betterment of our community.”* We are a community. We ride. We have fun. We do good works in our neighborhoods. We share experiences that will last a lifetime. That’s what the GWTA membership means to so many of us.

And that’s what I wish I could share with those members who are thinking about letting their memberships expire. If you’re in that situation, I wish you would think again. Go to a chapter meeting. Go on a chapter ride. Help out at a chapter event. If you have an idea, see if your chapter doesn’t jump at the chance to help you with it. I bet you’ll be surprised. The GWTA community is a fun, loving group that always welcomes a chance to get together for service.

Besides, the *Touring News* and the Blue Line (a 24/7 toll free number to access a directory of fellow members across the US and Canada who are ready to assist you in a travel emergency) are worth the price of membership alone.

Maybe you’re nowhere near a chapter. Maybe you are, but you don’t mix as well as you’d like with your local chapter. No problem! Let us know, and we’ll be glad to help you start a new chapter. You can be on the ground floor, set up the culture, and make things happen in a new way. Please, don’t give up on the GWTA until you’ve had a chance to see what it means to so many. Trust me, you won’t regret the effort, and you’ll make many life-long friends.

Don’t let your membership expire, or you’ll be missing out on “Destination Friendship”.

Jerry Weltner  
National R&R Director (Recruitment & Retention)