

RT3: An MSBA Annual Meeting Tradition on Two Wheels

For more than 100 years, Maryland attorneys have made “goin’ downy ocean” part of their summer routine. Their attendance at the MSBA’s annual meeting in Ocean City has become a pastime as cherished as a late-night boardwalk stroll to walk off a Thrasher’s Fries or Dumser’s Dairyland overindulgence. Some go a bit further - up to 178 miles in fact - with another tradition nearly 40 years in the making: *The Ride To The Tide* (or RT3), an annual bicycle trek from downtown Baltimore to Ocean City for the first day of the conference.

SINCE 1994, Baltimore-based Kramon & Graham, P.A. (K&G) has organized the RT3 each year for more than a dozen cyclists. It has evolved into a carefully choreographed event with traditions all its own. It has also become a rite of passage for summer associates, some of whom make the ride while others drive support vehicles to ferry the riders across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, supplying food and drink at rallying points along the way.

That summer, for reasons that remain unclear, four Maryland lawyers decided to go to the annual meeting by bicycle.

But 1994 only marked the beginning of the RT3 modern era. The ride’s origin story, as handed down through a hazy oral history, can most reliably be traced to 1984, long before carbon-fiber bikes, formulated sports drinks, and the wrist-mounted GPS came to cycling. That summer, for reasons that remain unclear, four Maryland lawyers decided to go to the annual meeting by bicycle. They did so with little planning, no in-ride support, and no cell phones.

J. Thomas Caskey, then at Semmes, is credited with the idea. Tom and Andy Graham had often attended the annual meeting, and Tom suggested cycling there, ignoring the fact that they were runners, not cyclists. They were accompanied by John Hayden III (Whiteford Taylor & Preston), who was a cyclist, and Walter D. (“Bucky”) Murphy, Jr. (Office of Bar Counsel), a rugby player.

Their equipment ranged from a 3-speed department store bike (complete with wicker basket) to a high-end 10-speed that John used for his daily commute to work. Tom attached a transistor radio to his handlebars and flew a 6’ foxtail flag to make himself visible. Bucky left his Annapolis home at 3:00 AM with a duffel bag full of books on his back, pedaling up to Baltimore to meet up with the others.

The quartet departed 10 Light Street at 5:30 AM with paper maps and no plan for getting across the bicycle-free Bay Bridge. They eventually convinced a maintenance worker to truck them

across and were dumped at the foot of the bridge. This marked the beginning of the white-knuckle portion of the program, with a narrow shoulder but plenty of speeding 18-wheelers to jostle them along Route 50, all the way to Kent Island.

None of the riders recalls what they did for nutrition during their 13-hour, 131-mile journey. One remembered stopping at a diner in Denton, where four underdressed city lawyers had to explain their appearance to fellow diner, local legend and Court of Appeals Judge Marvin H. Smith.

Few other details survive. Other than traffic, the only dangers they recall were a large dog, honor-bound to chase them from the family farm, and Bucky’s bag of books. He was preparing for rugby by season and thought the books would be an effective training tool. Bucky thought differently approximately 30 miles outside of Ocean City. Feeling sorry for him, Andy took the books and rode off with the understanding that one of the others would take them when they caught up. They never caught up. Andy rode solo the rest of the way with books but no map, navigating by the sun.

Fast forward to 1994, when K&G principal Lee Ogburn got a new bike and wanted to use it. After hearing about Andy’s adventure once or twice over the years, Lee suggested a redux, and K&G lawyers Anne Lobelle, Kevin Arthur, Andy and Lee decided to have a go at it. Having learned from the inaugural ride, a K&G employee accompanied them in a vehicle with food and water, and carried the riders across the Bay Bridge.

Andy, who was still not a serious rider, borrowed a bike with clipless pedals that attached his shoes firmly to the bike. Inexperienced and unable to disengage to put down his foot at stops, Andy toppled several times before getting across the bridge. Once on the Shore, he refused to stop at traffic lights or stop signs, opting to take his chances with traffic rather than risk another fall.

At first, RT3 was limited to K&G attorneys, but the roster quickly expanded. Nearly 50 lawyers, judges and friends (view the full list at [MSBA.ORG/RT3-RIDERS](https://www.msba.org/rt3-riders)) have since ridden some or all of the route, which has changed over the years. It now leapfrogs the treacherous portion of Route 50 after crossing the bridge and is ridden predominantly on scenic backroads. A purist’s option (the “long way”) was added in 1995 when Judge Arthur decided to take the bridge out of play and ride around the Bay through



Havre de Grace and Elkton, meeting up with the main group in Denton.

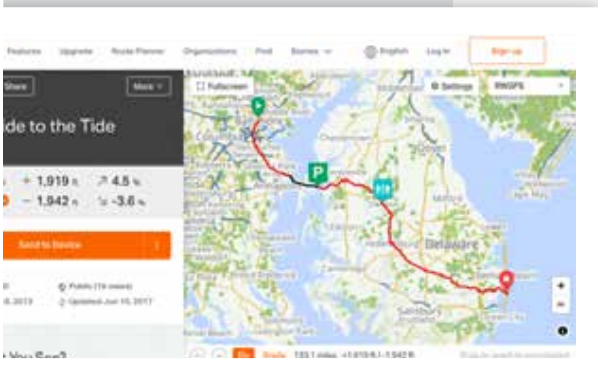
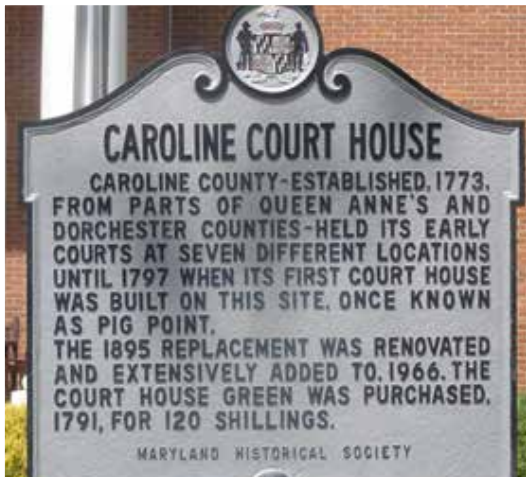
Since 1994, RT3 has taken place in all but two years - 26 rides in all - in conditions that have ranged from a chilly and wet 64° degrees to a hot and humid 98°. Several traditions within this tradition have developed.

The stop in Denton has remained a constant. The 19th century Caroline County Courthouse serves as the first stop on the Shore and as a rally point for stragglers. Reminiscent of the early encounter with Judge Smith, riders have on occasion been greeted with granola bars by Judge Karen Murphy Jensen. The courthouse steps were once used by a rider to show off his mounted bunny hops while others debated calling an ambulance for a rider who bonked. It is also Denton where K&G's John Bourgeois famously announced, "put a fork in me; I'm done," refusing to remount.

Next up is Federalsburg, a full lunch stop at the Federalsburg Family Restaurant where a group of (mostly) middle-aged attorneys in form-fitting bike wear always draw quizzical glances from the locals. After their next break at an abandoned building in Seaford, DE (known for its ambiance as "the crack house"), the riders cross the Nanticoke River on the 227-year old Woodland Ferry, en route to the 100-year old Bethany United Methodist Church in Lowe's Crossroads, DE. The riders have on occasion been welcomed by the minister, who encourages them to return on Sunday.

After re-entering Maryland from Fenwick Island, the RT3 ends in a hospitality suite at the Fenwick Inn, before the riders clean up and head down to Fager's Island for a celebratory dinner. After 7 hours in the saddle everyone eats and drinks guilt-free as the sun sets over Assawoman Bay to a tacky rendition of the William Tell Overture, another local tradition that predates the RT3 by only a few years. A K&G principal hosts a tongue-in-cheek awards ceremony to highlight the "accomplishments" of each rider, and then the younger riders head out for the night. The not-so-young riders do not.

The RT3 is judgment-free. There is no shame in riding only part of the way or hitching a ride in one of the support vehicles. On separate occasions cyclists ended their rides in emergency vehicles, one in a medevac helicopter and another in an ambulance. Each was the result of a single rider crash, and both recovered fully. Upon her release from the hospital, the airborne victim continued on to Fager's Island by car, scratched and bruised but in time for the dinner.



“It has provided wonderful memories and moments to connect with colleagues.”

“The Ride to the Tide is a great tradition,” said K&G managing principal David Shuster, a frequent participant. “It has provided wonderful memories and moments to connect with colleagues.” He noted that while the pandemic has forced the MSBA to hold its 2021 annual meeting virtually, K&G may nonetheless sponsor the ride to commemorate the conference and celebrate one of its own, M. Natalie McSherry, set to become MSBA president. Natalie will be following in the footsteps her great-grandfather, Judge James McSherry, who at a conference in Ocean City in 1897, became the first to hold the post. Another MSBA tradition within a tradition.