

# OJAI CYCLISTS' REAR BRIGADE LEAVES NO CYCLIST BEHIND

Story AND Photos By **HOLLY Roberts**

**S**mall, comfortable towns like Ojai are often magnets for interesting characters and Fawzi Emad is no exception. Emad, a man who confesses to having a thousand hobbies — including caring for 27 fruit trees and 7 pets, communing with computers and woodworking — still managed to create the Ojai Cyclists bicycling club in 2008 because he was tired of riding solo for miles up and down the Ojai Valley Bike Trail.

Besides the obvious safety advantage of riding with a group, Emad explains that it goes beyond bicycling. "We correspond. We talk. We solve problems for each other. I just call someone

'from the club about anything not even related to cycling' and they will come and give me a hand. It's just wonderful."

Fawzi Emad, born in Lebanon and educated at the American University of Beirut. Prior to moving West and founding the Ojai Cyclists riding club,

he worked for 38 years as an electrical engineering professor at the University of Maryland.

At the age of 50, a knee injury ended Emad's daily running routine and created an exercise junkie without an outlet — which drove his family crazy. Emad's son, an avid teenage bicyclist at the time, who regularly bicycled from D.C. to Boston, convinced Emad to purchase a 12 speed Schwinn and that was the beginning of the end game. "I went on my first 'bicycle' ride ever and fell in love with it immediately."



**OJAI CYCLISTS CLUB,** led by Fawzi Emad, left, vow to leave no rider behind.

Emad soon joined the Potomac Pedalers Touring Club in Maryland of which he was a member and organizer for 20 years before moving to Ojai. Soon after the move, Emad began to meet other cyclists along the Ojai Valley Bike Trail and made connections to ride together. He started an email list and was soon organizing regular rides three times per week for the newly christened "Ojai Cyclists" club "that nurtured newer, less advanced riders yet also provided rigorous exercise for those who wanted to ride fast."

Ron Dedinas, one of the regular riders in Emad's club, declared that "Fawzi is the heart and soul of the group. He welcomes all who share his passion for cycling to join us."

Although the Ojai Cyclists group has grown to 75 members with anywhere from 5 to 15 riding regularly on any one ride, there seems to be a place for all ages and abilities. Emad, at 71, is the oldest. Julianna Sproles, the world's toughest woman, is also among the regular riders.

The Ojai Cyclists even have their own cycling jersey which they designed themselves and which features 'Ojai Trees' and

'Ojai Bicycles.' Their website, designed and maintained by none other than Fawzi Emad himself, offers important club information, route details and maps, safety tips, hourly weather reports and contact information. "It is my hope that Ojai Cyclists will bring happiness and good health to all its members ... on and off the road." Emad said.

Visitors and locals alike are welcome to join in any ride. For more information, visit: [ojaicyclists.fpemad.com](http://ojaicyclists.fpemad.com). ■

**The Rear Brigade** is a slower group with an average speed of about 10-12 mph and rides less than 25 miles. The Rear Brigade is just what it sounds like - we leave at the same time, from the same place and take the same route as the faster cyclists, we just do it a bit slower. We also provide assistance for members who experience mechanical problems or flat tires. Some of the Ojai Cyclists are very strong fast cyclists and without the Rear Brigade, new people might feel intimidated at first. We exist to erase that intimidation and provide an enjoyable cycling experience.

People who would feel comfortable in this group should be able to ride at 10 - 12 mph in a relatively hilly environment on paved roads (public streets.)

Picture from another article (removed.)