

Corridor Inc.

COVER STORY

Leader of the Pack
By Christina Stanley

The Legend of Harley Davidson.

Ask anyone who rides a Harley and they'll tell you it's the wind in your face, the ear-splitting, guttural roar of the motor, the feeling of freedom and standing out from the crowd.

The Milwaukee-based company leaves most of its competitors in the dust. With 1,200 dealerships worldwide, 11 of them are scattered across Maryland.

With the opening of Old Glory Harley-Davidson in Laurel this fall, there will be five dealerships throughout the Baltimore-Washington Corridor, with one in Annapolis, Elkridge, Ft. Washington and Rockville.

"Harley-Davidson is part of the American culture," said Steve Scalia, one of the new owners of Old Glory.

"The dealership is a tribute to the local area," he said. "It's about the culture riders have created and the type of people in the Corridor — police officers, the military and government employees."



Armani Lowe, 16 months old, in leather with mom Kydie.



Fifteen years ago, Tina Ice took a chance on the Harley-Davidson legend. She and her husband, Ed Wehner, cashed in their savings and sold everything they owned to buy the Harley-Davidson of Maryland dealership in Elkridge, then located off the beaten path in a metal, two-story warehouse on Howard Lane.

She began by helping out in the parts department, but "the business side always interested me," said Ice. She had just begun getting more involved when her husband passed away unexpectedly in 2000.

It was a fork in the road for Ice, then 59. Should she sell the business or continue running it alone?

Not only did she decide to keep the dealership. She decided to build a better one.

Ice secured a \$5 million loan from Citizens National Bank to finance the expansion. Don Schline, a commercial broker with Columbia-based real estate group Manekin LLC, walked her through the process of finding, purchasing and developing the new site.

The new Harley-Davidson of Maryland in Elkridge is a 30,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art dealership in the Troy Hill Commerce Center — its imposing orange roof overlooking Route 1.

Today, Maryland's only female-owned Harley dealership has 54 employees. One of them is current husband, Chuck, who works for Ice as a salesman. The dealership netted \$15 million in sales in 2005.

Ice's success mirrors the success of Harley-Davidson.

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Dan Daniels', owner of Daniels' Restaurant and Bar on Route 1 in Elkridge.

Harley-Davidson Motor Co.'s ride began in 1903, the same year Ford got rolling and the Wright Brothers made their first flight. It survived two world wars and lean years, which resulted in a buyout by AMF — the same company that owns and operates bowling alleys.

"They ran it into the ground," said Ice. AMF mass produced the bikes, jeopardizing the quality standards Harley-Davidson had prided itself on.

In 1981, Harley-Davidson executives bought the company back and have spent years returning it to the fast lane.

"Harley has taken their brand on a symbolic ride," said Eric Swartz, founder and president of TaglineGuru, a San Francisco branding firm.

In 2005, Harley-Davidson celebrated its 20th consecutive year of record revenue and earnings. Ice has watched her customers change over the years, reflecting on the days when "a customer would spend his entire rent check to get a carburetor for his bike."

"Now you have businessmen and women," she said.

In fact, one in 10 bikers is a woman, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council.

"Buyers tend to be middle-aged people with white-collar jobs," said Swartz. "They're tired of being confined by their daily lives. When they're riding, they feel more freedom, more macho, more rebellion, and a touch of glamour."

Bob Burdon can attest to the escape motorcycling provides from the demands of a busy life.

As president and CEO of the Annapolis and Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce, Burdon dresses in a suit and tie. But on weekends, you'll find him in a pair of jeans, boots, black leather jacket and a bandanna.

"In the job that I do, there are pressures and issues I have to deal with. But when the weekend rolls around, riding gives me a total sense of relaxation," said Burdon, who actually rides a Honda motorcycle. However, his brother, a retired Navy captain, rides a Harley.

"It's not the destination — it's the trip getting there," said Burdon, whose riding community consists of fellow executives, judges and CEOs of banks.

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Sales Manager "Bingo" Fornier assists a customer in the showroom at Rockville Harley-Davidson.

While the tattooed behemoth with the salt-and-pepper ponytail may still be out there, today's biker is just as likely to be a doctor with a crew cut and four kids.

Bike rallies and other tribal gatherings organized by HOG (Harley Owners Group) chapters give bikers a chance to get together and make some noise. But underneath the gleaming chrome and black leather, these rebels have a cause.

Harley dealerships give back to their communities, sponsoring pledge rides, fundraisers and toy runs to benefit charitable causes.

Ice, who has a warm place in her heart for children with disabilities, participates in programs to raise money for the Benedictine School, the Johns Hopkins Children's Fund and Special Olympics Maryland.

Since 1980, the Harley-Davidson Motor Co. has raised more than \$55 million for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Overcoming stereotypes about bikers is exactly what Steve Scalia and Ryan Kelley of Charlotte, N.C. had to do when they decided to build Old Glory Harley-Davidson at the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and Laurel-Bowie Road in South Laurel.

Although Scalia and Kelley received the go-ahead in 2001 for the dealership location, they faced opposition from citizens based on the Harley-Davidson stereotype.

"The process took two years," said an unfazed Scalia, who plans to have 45 employees on staff by the end of the first year and forecasts annual revenues of \$10 million.

A long-awaited groundbreaking on the 30,000-square-foot dealership was held in October. Manekin Construction is building the new facility.

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If anyone knows the local Harley crowd, it's Dan Daniels.

The proprietor of Daniels' Restaurant and Bar has been serving up brews to bikers for the past 31 years.

At this establishment, you can pull your bike up to the bar and have a cold beer outside.

The restaurant is located on Route 1 in Elkridge, next door to McCullough's Custom Cycles, a full-service bike shop whose clientele has included the King of Jordan. Daniels estimates that 75 to 80 percent of his patrons ("motorcyclists, not bikers," he corrects) ride Harleys.

House rules, posted prominently over the bar and tightly enforced, include "No misconduct, no profanity and proper attire required."

Daniels has seen his clientele evolve over the years.

"It's a cleaner crowd now," he said. "Mostly baby boomers over 40. They've raised their families and now want some adventure in their lives."

And that adventure comes at a price. Harley Davidson bikes range from \$6,500 for an entry-level Sportster — a favorite with women — to a top-of-the-line Ultra Classic touring bike for \$20,600.

In addition, Harley enthusiasts spend about \$2,000 a year for extras including, say, a set of exhaust pipes for around \$400 or \$500, to help their bike make that distinctive Harley sound.

Beside the racks of trendy clothes for men, women and children in the sprawling, two-level showroom at Rockville Harley-Davidson, retail items run the gamut from skull clocks to black leatherette bike jackets for dogs.

The dealership's \$53 million inventory includes rows of shiny bikes with fancy paint jobs and names like Fat Boy, Screaming Eagle and Street Bob, and 9,000 interchangeable parts to help you customize your bike.

"It's like a Barbie doll for boys," said sales manager R. D. ("Bingo") Fornier.

Greg Sittig, 59, owner of Sittig Mortgage in Columbia, purchased his current bike — an anniversary edition 1998 Road King Classic — off eBay. Since then, he estimates he has spent \$6,000 or \$7,000 "dressing" his bike, adding chrome, accessories and parts.

Sittig's friend, Tommy Roland, 55, is what bikers call a reentry, or "born-again" rider. The realtor for Re/Max 100 got his first motorcycle on his 18th birthday. After 25 years, he's back in the saddle again, sometimes taking his Harley on real estate errands.

Most of the guys they ride with are other weekend warriors in their 40s and 50s — small business owners, a salesman, another in administration.

"We're not cowboys any longer," said Sittig. But they still have that same spirit, he explained.

"If I drove a Honda or BMW, I'd say I ride a motorcycle. I ride a Harley." ~

*Photos by John Keith*

