



Sal Lillianthal of the Bicycle Tour Company.

Judith Petrovich

# Kent Entrepreneur Sees the World on Wheels

By KATHRYN BOUGHTON

Many turn to Litchfield County for their recreation, finding in its beautiful hills and lovely villages a haven from the press of jobs, family duties and hectic commutes in more urban areas. Now, there is another option for those who want to move over into the slow lane. Sal Lillianthal, a former bicycle technician with world racing teams, has started The Bicycle Tour Company in Kent, offering guided luxury tours in both Litchfield County and in Europe.

"I have been associated with international racing for a long time," said Mr. Lillianthal, 33. "I've enjoyed it, traveling all over the globe, working with the teams and staying in

really nice hotels, but I kind of wanted to be closer to my family and I felt it was time to start my own company and move on."

In deciding his future, Mr. Lillianthal looked to his past. During his undergraduate years at Hobart College in Geneva, N.Y., and just after graduation, he acted as a tour leader with a student hostel program. He thoroughly enjoyed the process of leading teens on bicycle tours in the United States and Europe. "I had been on a tour as a teen, myself," he said, "and it really changed my life. It gave me an inner sense of freedom."

He decided to draw together his combined 16 years of experience as bicycle technician and tour director to form the Bicycle Tour Company in November, and is now marketing

five separate tours—three in Litchfield County this summer and two in Spain scheduled for the fall. The Litchfield tours, which are slated for July 24-26, Aug. 7-9 and Aug. 21-23, start and finish in New Preston and include overnight accommodations and gourmet meals at the Boulders and the Birches, both luxury inns on Lake Waramaug. Each tour is \$550, not including bike rentals.

"I was raised in Greenwich," he explained. "But my father used to bring me up here to go canoeing. I always loved this area. This whole area has a nice, warm New England feel to it that is perfect for bicycle tours."

The first day of riding on the Litchfield County tour takes the group on a loop through the rolling hills, with stops for pictures and

exploration along the way. Lunch is a picnic on the Litchfield Green, followed by tours at the White Flower Farm and Hopkins Vineyard the way back to Lake Waramaug. The final day's ride takes the travelers to Kent, with stops at Cornwall Bridge and Kent Falls State Park.

"This year we just set up for weekend trips in Litchfield County," Mr. Lillianthal said. "Next year I would like to plan a second trip that would be longer and would take people up into the Berkshires as well. We have set up each day's ride to be about 20 to 30 miles, with everything at a moderate pace—although we can do longer or shorter distances as people want. We want people to enjoy the scenery, to be able to stop and see the sights."

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Sal Lillianthal on a back road in Kent.

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## Bicycle Touring Company Sets Out From Kent

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The tours in Spain are for seven days and six nights and are scheduled for Sept. 11-17 and Oct. 5-11. The trips again include accommodations and most meals, but do not include airfare and transportation to Cordoba. Stops on the tour are: Cordoba, a Moorish city tucked in the foothills of Andalusia; Ubeda, a city set apart during Spain's architectural Renaissance; Jaen, site of the 13th-century Moorish fort Castillo de Santa Catalina; and Granada, home of the most visited Spanish attraction, La Alhambra. The cost is \$2,150.

"Most bicycle tours take the riders from inn to inn to inn," Mr. Lillianthal explained. "We have planned our itinerary so we stay in

cities where there are many places to eat and visit. For safety, we transfer the riders out into the countryside by van in the morning and then ride from there."

At the end of each day, riders are treated to a post-cycling massage by a Bicycle Touring Company "soigneur." In the bicycle racing world, soigneurs (care-givers) accompany each team to oversee the well-being of the riders. B.T.C. riders are to receive this same care from a staff directed by Dave Bolch, National Team and Saturn Cycling Team massage therapist. Mr. Bolch has joined Mr. Lillianthal as a member of the company's staff.

Each tour is limited to 15 persons, including staff. "We will have 12 guests and three staff members, which

is a very good staff-to-tripper ratio," Mr. Lillianthal said. "Especially in Spain, I feel it is important to have a well-rounded staff, to including people who are experts on the culture and history of the country."

Riders may bring their own bikes or may rent a bike for charge. "Currently we have 15 bikes," the tour director said, "all of them Cannondale hybrids, a kind of combination of a road bike and a mountain bike."

Plans for other tours fill Mr. Lillianthal's head. In coming years he plans a coastal trip in France and Spain, and is looking at coordinating excursions with a friend who runs a tour company in Wyoming. "I definitely want to get into planning Western trips," he said.

**The Bicycle Tour Company**  
**bicycletours.com**  
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