

# Christmas eve on two wheels

Bicycle shop offers guided luminaria tours for unique perspective of N.M. holiday tradition

BY CRISTINA OLDS

Since winter seems to have skipped over New Mexico thus far, how about an alternative holiday outing with family or friends on a smooth-riding cruiser to see the luminarias in Old Town? This Christmas eve, take a spin with Albuquerque's home-grown Routes Rentals and Tours bike shop along the Lights and Luminarias Holiday Bicycle Tour.

Duke City natives Heather Wess and Josh Arnold started their community-focused business almost two years ago now. Besides the luminaria tour, the owners and their two talented guides, Emily Kagan and Don Tilly, have shown locals and tourists alike the Balloun, Fiesta, hainted neighborhoods, wineries and a daily Bosque tour. They lead mountain biking tours in the foothills and single track river trails, too, and in the works are a foodie tour featuring four-course dining, a brewery tour and a chocolate tour.

"When we travel we love to park our cars and experience the place," Arnold said about the inspiration of the business. Both are avid cyclists, frequently bike commuting from their University-area home to work. Before starting Routes, Wess worked in marketing and corporate tourism while Arnold practiced architecture. Now the couple runs every aspect of the business, from leading tours to servicing bicycles.

"We are passionate about advocating on Albuquerque's behalf," Wess said, explaining that they'd both moved away and were drawn back to start something like Routes.

People can rent from the Routes fleet of cruisers, hybrids, tandems, road and mountain bikes, and the shop will deliver bikes to hotels on request. Along the tours, guides share history, folklore, trivia and sights such as movie locations and TV backdrops, which may become a Hollywood tour. Stars take advantage of rental bikes, too, Wess said. "We rented to Arnold Schwarzenegger about to times while he

was here," she laughed. "I didn't know it was him at first and thought he was doing an Arnold Schwarzenegger accent."

During the luminaria tour, the three-speed cruiser bikes with fat yellow tires and red leather seats will be decorated, making riders feel part of the holiday scene. Billed as a relaxing ride, guests roll from the shop into Old Town, where the city's largest concentration of luminarias will line the plaza in front of the San Felipe de Neri church. Riders can discuss the traditional votive candles in sand-filled paper bags that were first displayed by Roman Catholics hoping to guide the spirit of the Christ child to their homes. Whether to call them luminarias or farolitos (little lanterns) can be debated by riders while enjoying the Country Club neighborhood's impressive light display.

Before departing, the guides give instructions to riders about handling the two-wheeled steeds, how to travel safely and what to expect. They assess riders' abilities and what they hope to get from the tour, so everyone enjoys the trip. The beginner-intermediate tour is about to-miles of riding,



Josh Arnold and Heather Wess will make their fleet of cruiser-style bicycles available on Christmas Eve for a riding tour of Albuquerque's luminarias. The two are owners of Routes Rentals and Tours.

sometimes next to moving vehicles.

"The luminaria tour is such a great way to see the area and the lights," Arnold said. "Being on a bike allows you to cover a larger area... and people are in a great mood."

Besides putting more bikes on the roads and increasing visibility of riders with safe practices, Wess and Arnold are active volunteers with BikeABQ. Wess is the executive director and Arnold is a board member on this non-profit that educates and advocates to make Albuquerque more bike-friendly. "Our nights are consumed

with meetings to keep cycling healthy in Albuquerque," Wess said.

When that winter snow blows, Routes also rents snowshoe packages for \$15, and offers tours on the Crest Trail and in the Jemez. Typical of winter in Albuquerque, Arnold said they often rent snowshoes and bikes both in the same day. In the meantime, check out cyclists' dream gifts in the store, including icy tees, fancy leather grips, sassy bells, funky jewelry and, of course, bicycles made in the U.S. and custom fit to your personal riding style.

## MARQUEE

### Lights and Luminarias Holiday Bicycle Tour

**\$30, 6:45, 8p, Mon., Dec. 24**

Routes Rentals and Tours  
1102 Mountain NW,  
505.933.5667

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