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VIEW

## FORMER MONTREALER IS MAKING TEL AVIV A CYCLISTS' HAVEN

By **Janice Arnold, Staff Reporter** - June 20, 2016 > 17643 > 0



Bicycling in Tel Aviv FLICKR PHOTO

Sylvan Adams' goal is to turn Tel Aviv into "the Amsterdam of the Middle East."

He's not dreaming about tulips or windmills, but bicycles. Adams, one of the top masters road and track cyclists in the world, envisions a Tel Aviv that is as bike-friendly as the Dutch capital.

A Montreal real estate magnate who made aliyah in December, Adams has found a partner in the Jewish National Fund of Montreal (JNF) in helping make this a reality.

The publicity-shy Adams, 57, has agreed to be the honoree of JNF's annual Negev gala June 20. Proceeds will go toward the new Sylvan Adams Cycling Network, a project creating bike lanes between downtown Tel Aviv and its ever-expanding suburbs.



Sylvan Adams

Israel may still be thought of as an automobile-loving country, but cycling – for recreation and commuting – is becoming increasingly popular throughout the country, said Adams, a two-time world outdoor cycling champion in his age category.

His most recent title was won at the World Masters Championship, held in Manchester, England, last November.

Adams, who began cycling competitively about 20 years ago, is also a six-time Canadian and 15-time Quebec champion. He won four gold medals at two Pan-American meets and a total of five golds at the 2009 and 2013 Maccabiah Games.

"Amsterdam was a congested, car-centred city until the 1960s, when a deliberate plan was made by visionaries to transform it into a bike paradise," Adams said in a telephone interview.

He believes something similar can be done in Tel Aviv, where traffic congestion and a parking shortage are reaching a crisis as more and more motorists come in from "satellite" cities.

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"Petach Tikva, for example, is eight kilometres from the heart of Tel Aviv. That can take an hour to drive some mornings. By cycling, it is 20 to 30 minutes," he said.

Needless to say, switching from fossil fuel to leg power is a green, healthy and economical alternative. Israel's carbon footprint will be reduced, Israelis will get more exercise and save on gas, Adams believes.

A well-designed cycling network with the proper traffic signalling is imperative for safety, and it is expected that this project will reduce injuries by more than half.

Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai is fully onside, said Adams, who wants the network to ultimately connect all of the satellites. The city already has a bike-sharing program similar to Montreal's Bixi, and bikes can be mounted on city buses.

Adams hopes to promote cycling as a sport, as well. He is on the board of directors of the Israeli Cycling Academy, the country's only professional team, founded in 2014 and competing on the UCI Continental circuit.

Adams was instrumental in signing Canadian road champion Guillaume Boivin to the team this year. The Montreal native is proving to be a major asset. At the Tour d'Azerbaïdjan held over four days in May, Boivin led the pack for the first three stages before being overtaken in the final one.

"I think Israel's is the only professional team in the world that has three national champions: Boivin, Israel's Guy Sagiv and Dan Craven of Namibia," he pointed out. There are about five Israelis on the team.

"It was quite exciting to see the team in a Muslim country. Guy wore a jersey with a large Magen David," Adams said.

Adams hopes to develop more home-grown competitors in the future.

To that end, he is building not just Israel's, but the Middle East's, first velodrome – at the Olympic centre in Tel Aviv. Groundbreaking is slated for September.

Immigrating to Israel is something Adams began thinking about a couple of years ago. He and his wife of 32 years, Margaret, a native of London, England, whom he met while they were both working on a kibbutz, have settled into a beachfront penthouse apartment in Tel Aviv.

Adams has given up his involvement with the family business, Iberville Developments Ltd., the real estate giant founded after World War II by his father Marcel Adams, a Romanian-born Holocaust survivor.

The younger Adams was its CEO; his son Josh, one of his four children, is now running the company, one of the largest owners of commercial properties in Quebec.

In Israel, Adams said he is limiting his business activities to spend most of his time on philanthropy.

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Montreal JNF executive director Galith Levy said the cycling network project is a natural for JNF, which has a long history of developing Israel's infrastructure and improving its environment.

"It's true that I have avoided such honours in the past, it's not my thing," Adams said. "But, I'm using this cause as kind of my going away party."

The black-tie gala will take place at Marché Bonsecours in Old Montreal, and feature *Spin* by Cirque du Soleil. Levy said guests can expect an evening quite different from the usual testimonial. The chairs are Jonathan Goodman, Robert Kleinman and Joel Segal. Michael Goodman is JNF Montreal president.

To reserve tickets or inquire about sponsorship and donation opportunities, call 514-934-0313 ext. 235, visit JNF Montreal [here](#), or email [Montreal@jnf.ca](mailto:Montreal@jnf.ca).