

Shapiros rallying for a cause

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WOMEN'S
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When people say they love to travel, they usually mean to tourist destinations such as London, Paris, or Cancun.

But for **Michele and Robyn Shapiro**, sisters from Wayland, a shared love of travel will take them roughly 1,500 miles across the Moroccan desert in a Jeep guided by nothing but a compass and a topographical map.

Taking time off from their jobs as a research editor at Glamour magazine (Michele) and an account executive at the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi (Robyn), the sisters will head off this week to become the first United States team in the Rally Aicha des Gazelles, an annual women's rally that begins April 22.

According to their website (www.speedsisters.com), the Shapiros will be battling not just the other racers for the \$37,000 prize but also "intense conditions, such as sandstorms, poisonous snakes, and Algerian fundamentalists (who kidnapped 17 European tourists in the same area last year)."

Said Michele, "We are forbidden from using a GPS [global positioning system], which electronically gives you the [longitude and latitude] coordinates of where you are. The teams are made up of two people: a driver, me, and a navigator, my sister. We drive about 12 hours a day for eight days over 1,550 miles, and we have to navigate to various checkpoints along the way. The winner is the team that covers the least amount of ground."

It's not your average April vacation, but it's a dream come true for these sisters. "My first idol was Speed Racer," said Michele, referring to the TV cartoon character. "When people would ask me what I wanted to be, as a kid, I would say a race-car driver."

The Shapiros are racing to raise funds for a charity called Seeds of Peace, which brings together kids from all over the world to try to achieve peace among nations. They have raised close to \$2,500 already, and plan to donate their prize earnings if they win.

This is the first rally for the sisters, who live in New York City. Their lack of experience, as well as the dangers involved in the race, have their parents a little nervous.

"My mother was definitely nervous, which is understandable, since her idea of adventure is circumnavigating St. Barth's in a Jeep. But ultimately she's incredibly supportive," Michele said. "My father is a very proud Boston sports fanatic. He took me out of school for Opening Day of the Red Sox, and though he's also very nervous, I think he's happy that he finally has kids in the sports page."

Although both sisters say they're focusing only on this race, they acknowledge interest in making rally racing a full-time hobby. "I usually find myself doing the craziest things, so when I told my friends I was doing this race, they replied, 'Nothing you ever do will surprise me, Robyn,'" said Robyn. "I love to travel and I love to drive, so this is a perfect fit. I find it slightly ironic that I live in a city where no one drives and I want to enter a car race. But that doesn't stop me."

Best exercises

The 20th anniversary of the Women's National Collegiate Gymnastics Association championships will be held this weekend at the Johnson Athletic Center at MIT. The top eight teams in the country will be participating, including the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, which is looking for its ninth title.

The events begin tonight at 6. The individual champions will be determined at tomorrow night's session, which begins at 6:30. The top six competitors in each event will be named to the NCGA All-America team.

Play ball

The New England Division of the North American Women's Baseball League is holding tryouts for the 2004 season April 10, 17, and 18 at Lynn Tech Field House.

Players chosen for the North Shore Spirit will play games at the new Fraser Field. In addition, all league players have the chance of being selected for the Lady Spirit all-star team, which travels throughout the United States and Canada.

For more information, or to sign up, go to www.nawbl.com or contact **Robin Wallace** at 978-580-0886.

If softball is more your style, be sure to pick up your tickets for the New England Riptide, who play 30 home games at Martin Field in Lowell starting June 16. Season tickets are \$175, and individual tickets are just \$8.

Additional information can be found at www.neriptide.com.