

The Monmouth Journal

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Middletown Elks ride again for the children



Middletown Elks Lodge No. 2179 Exalted Ruler, Mike Dickie (from left) Leading Knight and Chairman of the Motorcycle Committee Bert Revill and Chairman of the Special Children Committee Nick Figaro, prepare for the Elks 8th Annual Ride for the Kids on Sunday, Aug. 1. Photo by Gary Chapman • The Monmouth Journal

[Publisher's note: On Sunday, Aug. 1, Managing Editor Gary Chapman took a ride with the Middletown Elks Lodge No. 2179 for their annual 'Ride for the Kids.' His report appears below.]

By Gary Chapman

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MIDDLETOWN — When the Middletown Elks' Bob Santoro called and invited me to ride in the 8th annual Middletown Elks "Ride for the Kids" poker run, I quickly put the date on my calendar.

No way I would miss this event, come rain or shine.

For those of you who never heard of a "poker run," it is a fun opportunity to support a worthy cause by purchasing a ticket for you and your motorcycle passenger. You ride your motorcycle to various locations and pick a card out of the hat. Your card pick at each location is recorded on your registration form and after the day is complete, the best poker hand wins a hefty share of the entrance fees.

More important is where the remainder of those fees goes. In this case, as is the case with most fundraisers run by the Elks, handicapped children benefit.

The stops on this day were at the respective Elk lodges in Old Bridge, Freehold and Long Branch. Upwards of 250 bikers joined forces to help the kids.

Mike Dickie, the Exalted Ruler of the Middletown Elks, walked around with a giant smile on his face, satisfied that six months of planning was going smoothly. Even the threat of severe storms on Sunday didn't prevent bikers from all over the state riding to Middletown to join in the festivities.

The ride was not the only part of this wonderful day, however. There were vendors, food and drinks, a dunk tank, The 3rd and Main Band from Point Pleasant — appearing free of charge — and a great deal of good old fashioned camaraderie. In addition, one lucky raffle ticket holder won a brand new 2011 Harley Davidson Fat Boy.

Now, back up five years ago.

My bride and I went to Rod's in Sea Girt for lunch. A very nice couple sitting there looked like they were riders, so we quickly struck up a conversation. They were Bert and Liz Revill, and this was his first time out after being hospitalized in a coma. No way I could believe this story I was being told in a bar, but it was true!

Bert and Liz were responsible for inviting us to that year's upcoming poker run and eventually to their grand event, The Charity Ball. Since that time, I look forward each year to the annual poker run.

Bert as it turns out, is the chairman of the Motorcycle Committee and The Leading Knight of the Elks. For you who are not familiar with Elkdom, it means next year he is the Exalted Ruler, the boss of the Middletown Elks. Bert and Liz led us on the run this past Sunday and it wasn't too difficult to see how proud he was of his "40" members of the Elks motorcycle gang.

Anyone who envisions bikers as crude, rude and tattooed, has to meet the guys and gals of BPOE No. 2179 in Middletown. They are a wonderful bunch that love kids and work their butts off in so many ways to provide for the handicapped.

Mike Dickie and Nick Figaro, the Special Children's Committee chairman, spearheaded recent fundraisers that resulted in a handicapped park being built at the Bayview Elementary School.

In addition, each Elk lodge in New Jersey sponsors special needs children each year to attend Camp Moore in northern New Jersey for a week at a time. The camp gives families a week off from caring for their special needs child, and gives the child an experience of a lifetime.

I can't tell you all how much fun such a day brought to me. In addition to riding my Harley, I know I am a little part of some special needs child's future. A small part, but a lot better than doing nothing for these deserving kids.

I loved the food at each stop, enjoyed the various T- shirts that were worn advertising Harley Davidson and locations from from Virginia, Rhode Island, Las Vegas, Paris, St. Thomas and even Alcatraz Prison.

I was impressed by the only female rider, Linda Melchionna from Belford, and I got a kick out of the Ladies Auxiliary who manned all the booths and joined their brother Elks in making the day such a huge success.

And finally, I was so proud of each of those 40 bikers who wore their Middletown Elks colors with a simple message embroidered on their vests. "To our absent Brothers."

So, Bob Santoro and Bert Revill — please remember me next year. I wouldn't miss it for anything!