

Winter doesn't inhibit enthusiasm for county's first Riders chapter

By Wade Coggeshall

AVON



A motorcyclist will always tell you it's riding weather. But the charter members of the American Legion Riders of Post 145 mostly agreed that wasn't the case on New Year's Day. So rather than risk themselves and their \$35,000 pieces of equipment, they chose to stay indoors that day and celebrate their status as the first Riders chapter in Hendricks County, as well as the fastest-growing in the state.

Jan. 1 was supposed to be the organization's inaugural ride, a chance to meet with the public and offer a free event as thanks for the support they provide year-round. While the weather proved too wintry, it or any other factor hasn't dampened enthusiasm for the Riders. With a Dec. 31 deadline, membership in the Post 145 chapter stands at about 60. That makes it the most flourishing in the state.

"We had one guy who went out and bought a motorcycle just so he could join," said Rick Haberman, communications director for the American Legion Riders of Indiana. "We've had other people join the American Legion just so they can be Riders."

It's no surprise.

"The Riders is the fastest-growing program of the American Legion," said Bob Schnell, state director of the Riders. "All over the country it's growing by leaps and bounds."

There were 14 new Riders chapters in Indiana during 2007, to bring the state total past 50. The lure is obvious: It's a chance to meet with like-minded individuals and ride in a large group. But the Riders also are in it for other reasons.

The preamble to their constitution states, "We, Your American Legion Riders, ride for God and country, the American Legion family, and allied veterans everywhere."

The annual Blue Star Salute Ride, which honors military families, is one of the Riders' largest functions. Last year's attracted hundreds of motorcycle enthusiasts.

"It was a thing of beauty seeing all those motorcycles," said John Reynolds, membership chairperson for the Post 145 Riders. "People who don't even ride thought it was great."

Now that the county has its own Riders chapter, organizers hope the 2008 edition, set for May 17, has a thousand participants.

The Son's Run, which is June 7, benefits Post 145's Sons of the American Legion chapter.

Every Memorial Day Weekend in Washington, D.C., the national Rolling Thunder Rally honors prisoners of war and veterans who are missing in action. Other functions raise funds for Veterans Administration hospitals and other military charities.

Each chapter also rides to aid charities for needy families, shelters, hospitals, and more in their respective communities.

Motorcycle safety is another aspect Post 145 plans to promote. Karen Buckner has volunteered to be the chapter's safety chairperson. Along with Tony Wilson, a squadron commander within the legion who has been riding for more than 30 years, they'll offer safety classes that are open to the public.

To be a Rider you must first be a member of the American Legion, its auxiliary, or Sons of the American Legion and be a legally registered motorcycle owner. Spouses also can join as long as they're legally married and also a member of one of the aforementioned groups. All fund-raising rides are open to the public.

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