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Robert Stoops / Times staff

Toney Buzick, left, and Jim Tilton, director and assistant director, respectively, of the Gold Wings Illinois Chapter Z, begin creating a float designed for the Illinois Gold Wing Riders Winter Warm-up Weekend Rally, which will take place Jan. 26-28, inside the Ramada Inn Convention Center, Effingham.

... AND MILES TO GO

Chapter Z meets, plans new events

By Kim Lunsford
Times correspondent

MORTON — Laughter filled the air of the Country Kitchen here as members of the Illinois Chapter Z of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association met for coffee and pie Thursday night.

The motorcycle enthusiasts hail from all walks of life, with positions ranging from nurses to librarians, pilots to accountants and Caterpillar employees. Some are even retired.

One thing they do have in common: They obviously love to laugh and have fun.

"All of us are joined by our love of motorcycling," charter member Debra York said.

"Everybody brings something new to the group."

Right she was.

Group member Bill Liberty stands out, with his jovial character and warm heart. He is "picked on" by everyone, numerous people in the group said.

York jokingly described Liberty as someone who "rides an ugly blue bike, acts as the group's bearded lady and is the overall group cross-dresser."

The group members talked Liberty into donning a dress for one day only to go with the theme, "A Day at the Circus" during the association's Winter Roundup. The Illinois rally provided a chance

for regional groups to compete in a float contest and light parade.

The chapter is part of the larger international organization. The GWRRA is the world's largest single-marque social organization for owners and riders of Honda Gold

Wing/Valkyrie motorcycles. They stand by the motto "Friends for Fun, Safety and Knowledge."

Typical GWRRA functions include restaurant runs, picnic rides, campouts and CPR/first aid workshops suitable for all family members. They also have dances, charity runs, parades, ice cream socials and riding clinics.



The Illinois Chapter Z is the No. 1 chapter in America for first aid and safety instructions, Wayne Sutherland said.

Member Mike Buzick has six different certifications. He is a medic first aid instructor, nationally registered EMT, road captain instructor, rider-co-rider instructor, certified automatic electric defibrillator operator and assistant chapter educator. The group — one of the earliest sponsors of the Susan G. Komen Ride for the Cure — is very serious about its participation.

"The ride would not be here without Chapter Z," York said as members on the other side of the room erupted in laughter.

"We go from the very serious side to just being goofy,"

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York said with a smile.

Across the room, dressed all in purple, from his purple tights to his purple suspenders that held up his shorts, was "Z-man," otherwise known as Larry Wilhelm. He flashed his cape as he came across the room with hugs and laughs for all. "He is our living mascot," Chapter Z director Toney Buzick said.

The group has plenty to be happy about. Through their meetings and 80-mile coffee runs, they accumulated 416,000 miles on their bikes in 2001.

Sutherland joked about the long coffee run.

He said a group of them got together to go get some coffee and the next thing they knew they were in Woodhaul. Another trip for lunch took them to Missouri. All in all, the group hopes to rack up the miles again this year to reach a

goal of 500,000 miles. They bragged about their big winners including, the female with the most miles. Trish Adcock, an elementary school teacher, put 14,000 miles on her bike.

Liberty was the member with the overall highest mileage of 29,550 miles.

The Gold Wings Illinois Chapter Z is made up of members from Pekin, Tremont, Peoria, Canton, Metamora, Bartonville and other nearby towns. Jim and Dee Tilton, assistant directors and recruiters, can give information to those interested in joining the group. They can be reached at 387-6212.

The group will be attending their first rally of the year in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., April 26 and 27. The 20th Annual Tennessee District Rally promises fun and fellowship, which would be hard not to have with a group like this.