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WASHINGTON COURIER

April 6, 2005

Vol. 48 / No. 18

Hagel Publications, Inc.

'Friends for Fun, Safety and Knowledge'

'Chapter Z' Gold Wing Riders a Fixture at Golden Corral Restaurant

by Tim Alexander
for Courier Newspapers

Festooned in their purple and gold shirts, jackets, and hats, they're hard to miss if you happen to be dining inside Golden Corral Restaurant in Washington on a given Sunday. After all, there are so many of them they take up an entire section of the restaurant. If their uniforms don't cause you to notice them, the simple fact that they're having so much darned fun will certainly catch your attention.

Even harder to miss are the dozens of Honda Gold Wing motorcycles belonging to the group that fill the parking lot of the restaurant when members of local Chapter Z of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRA) meet for their monthly Sunday meeting.

"We meet for fun, for food, and for rides- we all really share a love for riding," said Larry Lauterbach of Washington, a charter member of Chapter Z since its 1995 inception. "We go everywhere." **"Friends For Fun..."**

Though Chapter Z members hail from roughly a 50-mile radius around Tazewell County, the locals are actually part of a much larger GWRRA "family". The GWRRA was formed in 1977 by seven people with a common interest in Gold Wing and Valkyrie (now discontin-

ued) motorcycles who wanted to "establish an organization that would allow freedom from regulatory membership, yet still provide benefits superior to those available from other, more ordinary motorcycle groups," according to the organization's website. As of 2002 the GWRRA boasted 75,000 members in 900 chapters located in the U.S. and nearly fifty foreign countries.

Members are entitled to an array of benefits such as group cycle insurance rates, an emergency road service plan, dealer discounts, and motel and travel discounts. Aside from enjoying an opportunity to meet new friends with a common interest, members enjoy organized "ice cream runs", recreational and dining outings, and participation in community and charity events.

The organization's motto is "friends for fun, safety, and knowledge."

"Z" Far From Being A Snooze

Like the original seven GWRRA organizers who sought freedom from "regulatory membership", Chapter Z spun out from another local chapter whose members sought a different type of freedom- from inactivity.

"We were unhappy with the activities scheduled in our old chapter," said a long-time



Courier/Tim Alexander

Members of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association's local Chapter Z meet monthly at Washington's Golden Corral Restaurant. Members of the group, who hail from all around central Illinois, include (left to right) Bill Liberty, Linda Liberty, Bill Baker, Sue Baker, Donna Perego, John Fleming, Jim Perego, Carol Fleming, Jane Weiss, and Tom Weiss.

Chapter Z member. "We decided we needed to have a lot more activities. Each chapter has its own personality- some are more reserved than others. We're one of the more active chapters."

After meeting initially at Hunt's Restaurant in Peoria, the group eventually found a home at Golden Corral. An entire wall of the restaurant is now adorned with the group's "coat of arms", awards, and plaques.

The group's travel resume makes John Steinbeck's Travels With Charley appear to be a puddle jump. According to Lauterbach the group has made sojourns to New York, Texas, and most points in between. Next month, Chapter Z has a trip planned to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Later this year group members will attend the GWRRA's annual "Wing Ding" celebration set for Fort Wayne, Indiana. The largest GWRRA rally of the year, Wing Ding typically draws around 10,000 Gold Wing enthusiasts together for a four-day family "reunion". Past Wing Dings have been held in places such as Madison, Tulsa, Louisville, and Albuquerque.

Closer to home, a group of "Z-ers" recently got together for a bowling outing at Eureka's Derer Lanes before proceeding

to the Village Inn in Spring Bay for dinner.

A website (www.il-chapter-z.org/) and newsletter are maintained by current Chapter Z directors Carol and Johnnie Fleming of Pekin in order to help keep members informed of the group's activities, which average several per month.

Ride For The Cure

Chapter Z is one of the original sponsors of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation's "Ride For the Cure", an annual event that attracts hundreds of cyclists to Peoria who pay "pledges" to ride in a motorcycle parade for charity- emulating the walkers and runners in the "Walk For the Cure". The club's efforts have helped raise thousands of dollars for the cause of breast cancer awareness and research.

"This will be our eighth or ninth year with Ride for the Cure," Lauterbach said. "Last year we had around 1100 riders and collected around \$30,000."

This year's Ride for the Cure embarks from The Shoppes at Grand Prairie at noon on May 7 and will wind to the East Peoria Convention Center at the Oaks in East Peoria. Auctions, door prizes, and food will be offered to those who make a \$20 donation to the event. (For more information, contact Becky

Schupp at (309) 248-7848.)

"Z" is also part of a coalition of motorcycle clubs that sponsor BASH (Bikers Against Street Hunger).

Comfort and Style

Jim Perego of Chapter Z said that Gold Wing motorcycles are not only beautiful machines but are built for comfort, as well.

"They are very comfortable for longer rides," Perego said. "In fact, they're so comfortable my wife has been known to fall asleep behind me. I can tell when her helmet bumps the back of my neck."

A Gold Wing motorcycle may often be equipped with a cargo trailer or camper and group members often communicate to each other through intercoms or headsets tuned to a citizens' band radio frequency (Chapter Z utilizes channel seven). All in all, riding a Gold Wing appears to be far from the ordinary biking experience.

"Gold Wings are the Cadillacs of motorcycles," Perego said. "They're a lot of fun."

Judging from the laughter emanating from Golden Corral's meeting room last Sunday, the fun of riding a Gold Wing must certainly rub off on its rider.

For additional information on Chapter Z or the GWRRA, see the chapter's website or phone (309) 353-7268.



Courier/Tim Alexander

Bill and Sue Baker of Tremont have toured a good portion of the country on their Gold Wing motorcycle with local Chapter Z of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association, but one of their favorite trips is from their Tremont home to the chapter's monthly meetings at Golden Corral Restaurant, 1896 Washington Road.