

Motorcycle hearse gives people a unique farewell

By Greg Stanmar

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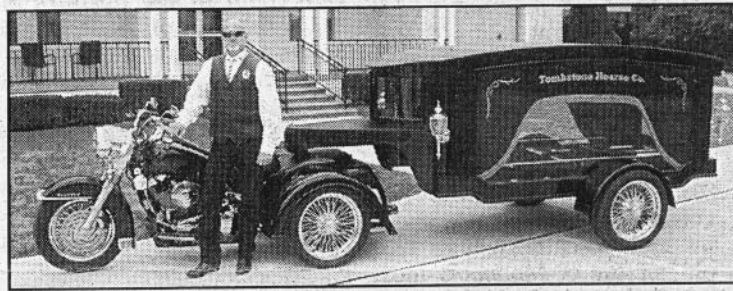
STREATOR — The stares Gary Simko gets riding his motorcycle from his Boys Street home in Streator to a funeral home multiply after he's picked up his passenger and leads a line of black limousines and other vehicles to a cemetery.

Simko, 54, a retired LaSalle County sheriff's detective sergeant, is now in the business of giving ardent motorcycle fans an appropriate farewell with a hearse coupled to his three-wheel motorcycle. "When a Cadillac just won't do," advertises Simko on his business card for Midwest Iron Horse Funeral Coach Service.

"I have seen several different services of firemen on back of fire trucks, semi-tractor trailer drivers on the back of flatbeds, so I just wanted something that pertained to motorcycle riders," he said. He was not alone in his idea and Tombstone Hearse Co. out of Pennsylvania makes a unit that can be coupled to motorcycles.

Simko knows of a half-dozen similar ventures in the U.S., with the closest in Detroit. The hearse he selected was modeled after the horse-drawn one that carried Jesse James to his Missouri cemetery in 1862. The life-long cop sees no irony in using a hearse modeled after that used by one of the country's most notorious 19th Century criminals.

"No, nothing ironic," he said. "It's just the way it was." As word spreads of his service, Simko is finding customers throughout the Midwest, including a recent one in Streator. Usually the spouse of the deceased



For The Pantagraph/GREG STANMAR

A hearse attached to a motorcycle can give motorcycle fans an appropriate farewell.

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contacts Simko for the beloved's last ride. As a motorcycle enthusiast, Simko knows the love one develops for the avocation.

"We do the same thing a traditional service would do: take them from the funeral home to the church and then to the cemetery," said Simko, whose love of motorcycles began in 1973 while working with a Florida police department.

His dress is a tuxedo shirt, blue jeans, black leather vest and highly-shined boots with a single spur. The spur is an old cavalry tradition for taking deceased horse soldiers to the cemetery.

He declined to estimate how much a funeral home adds on for the unique twist, though he

said the cost of his services increase in 50-mile increments from Streator.

He also declined to give the cost of his new Harley-Davidson and the hearse attachment. Customers are typically middle-age or older motorcycle enthusiasts. But in one case the hearse was picked by parents of a child who enjoyed the sport.