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of RACINE COUNTY



Fall
2024

Published by Southern Lakes Newspapers LLC



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Hundreds help at annual Toy Run

Tri-County Riders makes 25 stops to pick up donations

By Jason Arndt
STAFF WRITER

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, hundreds of motorcyclists went on a mission to make Christmas possible for needy families in Racine, Walworth, and Kenosha counties, with the Tri-County Riders holding the 30th annual Toy Run for Love, Inc.

Founded by the late Chuck and late Karen Dexter of the Log Cabin Tavern in Burlington, the event features motorcyclists making stops at dozens of establishments in multiple counties before ending at the festival grounds off of Maryland Avenue in Burlington.

"They wanted to help children at Christmas, so they paired up with Love, Inc. and started this little run," said Tri-County Riders President Nash Kinnard. "It has grown from a 50-bike run to what you see today."

The Toy Run typically draws anywhere from 300 to 1,200 motorcycles participate on an annual basis.

Kinnard said the most recent event, held Sept. 8, would not have been possible without the support of motorcyclists, establishments, and the community for contributing to the group's mission.

"The bars, establishments, and all of these riders have given us the opportunity to run this," he said. "If it wasn't for them, we would just be a couple of guys going for a ride. They are the ones that make this happen."

Tri-County Riders made more than two dozen stops, including venues in all three counties, with some establishments making sizable contributions.

Kinnard reported 2 Brothers Bar and Grill from Pell Lake had more than 19 boxes of toys waiting for pickup, while The Village Tap in Lyons presented 61

children's bicycles.

"That is just two out of the 25 stops that we had today," Kinnard said.

Bikers could select one of five runs, each featuring five establishments, based on informational flyers from Tri-County Riders.

At the end of the day, volunteers treated bikers to free food, beverages, and entertainment provided by Twin Rivers Band on the festival grounds.

Giving spirit

Love, Inc., which offers a Christmas program for families in need, receives a large contribution from the Tri-County Riders Toy Run.

Executive Director Terri Plachy of Love, Inc. said the recent event also saw the Burlington High School boys soccer program contribute to the cause by serving meals to riders upon completion of the Toy Run.

"Today has been a very big day. We have about 30 kids from the Burlington High School soccer team here. They are actually serving all of our riders and doing it cheerfully," Plachy said.

Love, Inc. plans to distribute items from the Toy Run to agencies in neighboring counties, including the Sharing Center in Trevor, for its Christmas program.

"This is probably one of the biggest parts of our Christmas program," Plachy said. "We share what (Tri-County) has given us with other facilities in those counties."

Kinnard said Tri-County Riders spends the year planning for the event with one simple mission.

"We help support families at Christmas in all three counties," he said. "Everything that we do all year long goes to the Christmas program for these families."



top: Motorcyclists make their way to the final stop in September after the Tri-County Riders Toy Run for Love, Inc., which featured stops in Racine, Walworth, and Kenosha counties. **above:** Volunteer Michael Plachy, of Love, Inc. carries two children's bicycles to a staging area at the end of the run in Burlington.

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left: Chris Winters was one of many bikers to help unload the amazing amount of toys donated for the recent toy run. **right:** Chris Clapper of Tri-County Riders helps unload trucks filled with toys.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County

Wonders of Racine County

A publication of Southern Lakes Newspapers LLC
1102 Ann St., Delavan, WI 53115 • (262) 728-3411

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On the cover: The Waterford River Rhythms held its final concert of the 2024 season on Aug. 29 at Village Hall Park in Waterford. The season finale featured The Super Tramp Tribute Band. Providing food and beverages for the event were The Cotton Exchange Catering, Waterford Stillhouse and the Waterford Lions Club.

CHAD HENSIK Wonders of Racine County

BURLINGTON RECOGNIZES A Revolutionary War soldier

By **Jason Arndt**
STAFF WRITER

The Burlington community remembered a Revolutionary War veteran this summer when officials dedicated a new memorial marker to honor Patriot Aaron Smith at Cooper Elementary School.

Smith, the only known soldier from the Revolutionary War buried in Burlington, was born in Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1760 and enlisted in the 5th Regiment, Massachusetts Line of the Continental Army, as an 18-year-old.

After serving for several years, Smith received a discharge, and eventually moved to Medina County, Ohio, in 1821.

Smith and his wife, Lydia, joined their three sons in Foxville, now known as Burlington, in 1836.

In 1838, at the age of 78, Smith died and was buried next to his wife on a family farm near the Cooper Elementary School grounds, based on historical accounts.

Julie O'Neill, of the Burlington Historical Society, said during the ceremony the memorial marker is the third to be installed in Burlington since 1955.

"In 1955, the Daughters' of the American Revolution placed a plaque on a large boulder in Wagner Park on Chestnut Street, along the White River," O'Neill said. "At some point that plaque went missing. The boulder is still there."

The Daughters of the American Revolution, in conjunction with the Burlington Historical Society, then created a second flat memorial marker near the old bell at Cooper School.

By 2022, the Burlington Area School District had enclosed the playground, leaving the monument inaccessible to the public.

"At that time, it was decided to move the second plaque near the newly planted Liberty Tree and place a more prominent plaque on the corner of Amanda and Conkey streets," O'Neill said. "We are dedicating that plaque today."

Dedicated to service, family

President Bob Haglund, of the Sons of the American Revolution, offered a precise description of what is engraved on the plaque honoring Smith in his address to those in



left: Julie O'Neill, of the Burlington Historical Society, delivers an introductory address during a dedication ceremony honoring Revolutionary War veteran Aaron Smith this summer at Cooper Elementary School. **right:** President Bob Haglund, of the Wisconsin Society for the Sons of the American Revolution, describes what is engraved on a memorial plaque honoring Smith.

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attendance.

"At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Aaron was too young to enlist. So, at the age of 15, he became a servant to a relative, Eliakim Smith, a captain of the Continental Army," the inscription reads.

In July 1778, while residing in Massachusetts, Smith joined the Continental Army serving under several captains during his tenure.

"Smith was present at the Siege of Yorktown and was mustered out two years later in 1783," the inscription states.

During the War of 1812, Smith attempted to re-enlist. However, he was denied because of his age.

But he was still able to serve as a substitute volunteer for his son-in-law, who had been drafted.

Jeanette Lederleitner, Racine Chapter Regent of the Daughters of the Revolution, delivered a personal reflection of Smith based on an 1822 letter from Smith's



physician, Dr. Bela Bronson Clark, to Connecticut Sen. Elijah Boardman.

"Accompanying you will receive papers relative to the revolutionary claim of Aaron Smith. This old gentleman is now near 70 years of age, laboring under an injury he received in fighting for our liberties," the letter states. "He found himself in the prime of his life, and as he enjoyed his health in other respects, he thought he could make a living."

The letter further states Smith's advanced age and diminished condition served as a call for assistance from the United States to help Smith and his wife.

"He has contributed to give his countrymen liberty and all its blessings," the letter states. "He now calls upon the same countrymen to contribute to his support."

O'Neill, amid planning for the ceremony, corresponded with Smith's fifth great-granddaughter Diana Tolladay, who delivered some brief remarks to O'Neill.

Tolladay spoke of Smith's dedication not only to the country, but also to his family, with which he shared high-quality attributes.

"Aaron Smith exemplified the puritan, pioneering spirit – being honest, being thoughtful, setting a good example," O'Neill recited from Tolladay's remarks, adding Smith strived for a family-centered, harmonious, and healthy community.

Community spirit

The dedication would not have been possible without the support of several community partners, according to O'Neill, who praised BASD for allowing the historical society to place the memorial marker on school grounds.

Other contributors included the DAR, which played a key role in funding for the memorial marker, O'Neill said.

"The Racine Chapter contributed funding for this new plaque," O'Neill said.

Additionally, the Burlington Area Garden Club planted flowers to enhance the memorial, while Brian McManus and Bob Koenecke installed the post attached to the plaque and assisted with planting the Liberty tree.

The SAR, meanwhile, participated in the ceremony by providing the Color Guard to show appreciation for Smith's service.

O'Neill also acknowledged Sam Keith, of the Wisconsin Sons of the American Revolution, who diligently searched for Smith's service record.

"Sam was instrumental in verifying Smith's service record, writing the text for the plaque, applying for grants for funding, and planting the Liberty Tree," she said, adding that he had passed away a few weeks prior so unfortunately did not get to see the memorial plaque installed.

O'Neill said the local historical society has been actively involved in recognizing Smith for several years, including contributions of funds, maintaining records, and telling Smith's story to visitors of the building.

O'Neill, in particular, commended the late Don Vande Sand for his service and assistance in preserving Smith's record and dedication to Burlington's history.



Members of Jubilate Community Singers, of Burlington, deliver a rendition of "Buttermilk Hill" at the ceremony. From left are Eileen Mirsberger, Ann Newman, artistic director Anne Arnetta, and Margie Hackbarth.

From the left: Representatives from the Wisconsin Sons of the American Revolution – Matt Schoberg, Bob Plastine, and Mike Meador – showcase the colors in the background of the memorial marker.

PASSING the BATON

Long-time Civic Band leader steps down

By Jason Arndt
STAFF WRITER

Chris Peterson, director of the Burlington Kiwanis Civic Band, has served as a key member of the group, which is known for entertaining generations of community members during the summer months at Echo Veterans Memorial Park.

But after guiding nearly 300 shows in a span of 48 years, Peterson officially put down his baton in late July, when the Kiwanis Civic Band performed its last concert of the summer.

Peterson, who officially passed the baton to long-time member Lisa Werner, joined the group out of college and never imagined conducting the community group for close to five decades.

However, considering the family-like closeness of the group, Peterson said his time as director flew by rapidly.

“We all looked forward to seeing one another every summer, and it is a family reunion,” he said. “It has happened really quick when you have fun every summer.”

In addition to active band members, Peterson’s final show also brought former members, including Deb Floyd-Mertins from Racine.

Floyd-Mertins, who played with the group from 1980 through 2000, said she knew she had to come back and play one last session with Peterson directing.

“It was very important to come back,” she said. “I knew I would regret it if I didn’t come back for this last concert.”

Floyd-Mertins said Peterson’s dry sense of humor and willingness to work with every band member has been pivotal to the group’s longevity.

“He’s got a great sense of humor and is very organized. He has done so much for the band,” she said.

Instrumental growth

Margo Kurth, of Lyons, joined the band in the late 80s.

At the time, the Burlington Kiwanis Civic Band played at Wehmhoff Square Park, where Kurth played with about 25 other members.



Director Chris Peterson, Burlington Kiwanis Civic Band, reunites with former band member Deb Floyd-Mertins during his last performance late this summer at Echo Veterans Memorial Park before his retirement.

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top: Peterson leads the Burlington Kiwanis Civic Band in his last appearance as director of the long-standing group. **above:** Lisa Werner, a member of the band, prepares for a musical piece during the final performance under director Chris Peterson. Following Peterson’s retirement, Werner assumed the role as director.

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Since then, Kurth, a band board member, has seen the group grow from a little more than two dozen members to as many as 50 on any given weekly show, which is held Fridays in June and July at Echo Veterans Memorial Park.

Kurth, who said she performed at every single concert, even while recovering from heart surgery, acknowledged Peterson has always been quick-witted, with no shortage of one-liners.

“His humor is really dry,” Kurth said. “He never gets critical if somebody makes a mistake. Even if you are not perfect, that is okay. You can still keep playing.”

Kurth said the Civic Band is one of the oldest community bands in Wisconsin with one member being part of the group for 55 years.

“It’s going to be very tough to not see him up there directing,” she said. “Lisa will do a fantastic job, but it is going to be very hard not to see him up there.”

Journey to Burlington

Peterson, who lives in Mukwonago, graduated from college with a degree in music education and began seeking work.

When the band director post opened, Peterson seized the opportunity, leading the charge since the Gerald Ford Administration.

Outside of music, Peterson took a different career path, joining and eventually owning a Mukwonago-based horticulture business before selling the establishment about four years ago.

Within the last few years, Peterson knew he needed to find a successor, and he has confidence Werner will serve the Kiwanis Civic Band admirably.

“I love doing this, but at some point in time, you look for somebody that is really qualified that can take over the band,”

he said. “We have grandkids and want to travel, and it’s hard to do in the summer when you know you have responsibilities every June and July.”

Passing the baton

Werner, who is also from Mukwonago, serves as a music educator at a Dousman parochial school.

She isn’t new to the area, having graduated from Waterford Union High School before receiving a music education degree at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and then going on to earn a master’s degree.

Werner, whose parents also joined the band, said she grew up with the group and found Peterson an influential figure in her voyage as a music educator.

“I love music. We joined this band and it has been a part of our life ever since,” Werner said. “(Peterson) was a pivotal part in my journey as a music teacher. I learned a lot from this band and I feel like I am in a good spot.”

She also acknowledged Peterson’s witty sense of humor.

The Burlington Kiwanis Civic Band, at random times, would surprise Peterson with a rendition of Hogan’s Heroes during concerts.

But Peterson always took it in stride and continued with the show.

“I think we have always enjoyed when we get him on the Hogan’s Heroes thing,” Werner said. “He has high expectations for everybody, but he is always cracking jokes.”

Despite stepping down as director, Peterson said he still plans on participating with the Kiwanis Civic Band, playing a supporting role in the percussion section.

Waterford's Ruland claims discus gold in world championships

By Jason Arndt
STAFF WRITER

Mike Ruland always wants to see his children succeed through hard work and determination, like any dedicated father. His son, Bryce, a 2024 Waterford Union High School graduate, did just that at the World Athletics U20 Championship in Lima, Peru, by capturing a discus gold medal as a representative of USA Track and Field. When Bryce first discovered he won, throwing 205 feet, 4 inches on Sept. 1, he quickly embraced his father and certified coach as part of the celebration. "Honestly, you can't describe," said Mike, whose voice crackled and was on the brink of tears as he spoke. "Just to see someone work so hard and have an experience like that, I was very, very proud."

A two-time WIAA Division 1 State Champion in the discus throw, including a state meet record of 212-01, Bryce entered the Peru competition ranked 14th in the world.

Bryce, who spent a week in Peru preparing for one of the last scheduled events, had a simple objective on the world stage. "I was kind of just looking to make finals and hopefully the podium. Then things came together really well," Bryce said. Bryce didn't just win gold. He became the first American to capture the coveted medal in the event since 1996. "I didn't realize it has been that long," he said. He qualified for the world championships from a national meet held in Eugene, Oregon, shortly after he achieved his second consecutive state discus title.



above: Bryce Ruland (left) wears his gold medal alongside his father, Mike, in September at Waterford Union High School. **right:** Bryce Ruland showcases the American flag after he won the discus gold medal at the World Athletics U20 Championships in Lima, Peru earlier this month.

JASON ARNDT Wonders of Racine County



High potential

As a youngster, Bryce would often throw the discus in his driveway under supervision from Mike, who saw immediate potential. "We started throwing discus in the driveway. It started with a lighter discus when he was younger," he said. "I knew right away that he would have talent." Bryce has collected multiple accolades, including a school record, and a spot on the University of Iowa track and field team.

Calm and collected

While Mike admitted to seeing Bryce have some rattled nerves at the state meet, that was not the case on the world stage. "I did see him get a little bit flustered, I think at the state meet because I think he was putting a lot of pressure on himself," Mike said. "What was interesting to me is when he was at worlds, you could tell he was at a different place. He was there having fun, he was enjoying it. Given the magnitude of the

event, he was pretty calm." For most athletes, being one of the last competitors to take the stage could bring some anxiety. For Bryce, he simply focused on the task at hand, including cheering for 100 of his teammates. "I was just staying in the moment and watching other people go," Bryce said. "We knew that going in. It was just a longer wait." Bryce will look to continue his throwing career for the Hawkeyes.

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A special night for snazzy seniors

Elder Care assisted living facility holds prom for residents

By **Jason Arndt**
STAFF WRITER

Residents of Elder Care Cottages in Waterford took a step back in time this summer when they danced to classic tunes and enjoyed camaraderie with others during the assisted living facility's first-ever prom.

Elder Care, a 60-bed facility with four cottages, saw more than half of its residents participate in the event, with some waltzing alongside family members who came out to show support and join the fun.

Activities Director Katelyn Winski, who helped coordinate the event, said there was one simple objective for the prom.

"I wanted to make it very special for them. That was my goal," she said.

The residents that attended did more than just show up. They came dressed in classic tuxedos and dresses, complete with corsages and boutonnières, and savored the music presented by a live DJ.

"It has been a blast. They are having so much fun. I am even getting emotional seeing their smiles," Winski said. "Everyone was dancing."

The best part, she said, was family members getting out there and dancing with their loved ones.

"It is very touching that we have so many family members that are supportive of us," Winski said. "They wanted to come

and join us and have fun."

Nikki Emanuele, Community Relations Director for Elder Care, coordinated the event with Winski.

She agreed with Winski, and said she rejoiced at seeing participating residents dressed in formal wear.

"The prom turned out better than what we could have imagined. The residents love being all dressed up, having their hair done and make up on," Emanuele said. "The families came and they enjoyed it."

Months of planning

Emanuele said the idea for a prom began as a simple discussion during a staff meeting several months ago.

During the meeting, many staff members shared their experiences from other facilities, and Winski brought up the idea for a prom.

"Katelyn brought it up, and our administrator said 'Go for it,'" Emanuele said.

From there, Elder Care reached out to families, businesses, and local organizations seeking support for the prom.

Elder Care officials said they received contributions from many organizations, including Waterford Union High School – which donated prom decorations.

Donations also came from The Haylofters theater group in Burlington –



for dresses, and Mealy-Stencil Funeral Home – which contributed floral arrangements and photography services.

The prom received additional contributions from BUSIAS XOXO, Heartland Hospice, Badger Hospice, and Moments Hospices, as well as assistance from the Amargost and Raboine families.

"Everybody that was asked for donations and entertainment was very receptive," Emanuele said. "It was kind of overwhelming."

Winski said Elder Care caregivers as well as residents' families played a key role in facilitating the event.

"I just wanted to give a shout-out to all the families that came to support us," she said, explaining that some families donated snacks and refreshments.

"The caregivers have been a phenomenal help here. They came on their time off to help out with the prom," Winski added.

Emanuele said she believes the prom will become a tradition at Elder Care based on feedback from residents.

"Several residents had asked if we could do it again next year," Emanuele said. "We will definitely do it again."



above: Jackie Taylor, prom queen, dances with Elder Care activities director Katelyn Winski during a special prom event held this summer at the facility. **far left:** Prom King Patrick Michalek enjoys camaraderie with his fellow Elder Care residents during the dance. **at left:** Peggy and Joseph Dolce enjoy a dance during the prom, which was organized to treat residents and their families to a special time.

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