

Law Enforcement's Torch Ride For Special Olympics



According to the Special Olympics AZ website, "The Law Enforcement Torch Run is a series of intra-state/intra-nation runs that take place in the spring and summer in the United States and around the world." The initial intent of the LE Torch Run was to "provide local law enforcement with opportunities to volunteer with Special Olympics in communities where the officers lived and worked." That has evolved into Law Enforcement prevailing upon the motorcycling community each year to help them raise money for Special Olympics.

This was the 16th annual such event for Special Olympics Arizona. Chester's Harley-Davidson Mesa has been the host since #7 back in 2006, after the dealership came into existence.

This year's LE Torch Ride had a MOST disturbing incident take place; the wreck of Al & Samantha Barela *despite* a Law Enforcement escort. You will read about this elsewhere in these pages.

But, as reporters, it is also our place to share with you news of bikers once again coming out in support of an organization that does so much for people within our larger community ~ Special Olympics AZ.

Special Olympics is a nationwide organization that has programs to assist people with intellectual disabilities "to develop physical fitness and become competitive athletes, gain the knowledge and resources to live a healthy lifestyle, and evolve as

leaders and important members of society. There is no cost for athletes to participate in Special Olympics." That's where the Torch Ride, and other fundraising efforts, comes in.

Because of the tragedy of the Barela wreck, our usual sources of followup details for this year's fundraiser are precluded from discussing the event with us at this time. So we will share our observations and photos of the morning activities at the staging venue, Chester's Harley-Davidson.

Our ride into town previewed a beautiful day to be on the road. Blue sky, nice temps... just what you'd hope for.

As always, the parking organization was well handled. They've had years of practice. In speaking with one of the coordinators, he estimated around 750 motorcycles at that time... after which we observed bikes still trickling in.

The band 'Sideways' entertained as riders signed in at the Mesa dealership, located at 922 S. Country Club Drive. In the registration area, support shirts were available for purchase as well as raffle tickets for goods such as travel opportunities and restaurant cards. Those drawings were called before departure.

Breakfast of pancakes, sausage, juice, coffee, & water was included in the entry fee. More than you were hungry for? A coffee station with pastries was also available. Breakfast was provided by WalMart. I always thought that meant they just donated the

food, but this year I had the chance to speak with a fellow on the cook team & learned that people from WalMart's Transportation Division come in 'hands on'... They buy, cook, & serve the food... set up & breakdown the prep & serving areas... all steps... all donated. Very cool.

Tables & chairs on Chester's Patio were filled with scooter folk enjoying breakfast & camaraderie as they awaited the call to the staging area. Indoors, the dealership was buzzing with shoppers.... browsing & buying.

We spoke with riders who participate in this run every year plus new attendees. At 11:30, riders gathered at the stage for the crowning of Miss Torch Ride 2015, raffle drawings, announcements, and the National Anthem. We made our way to our bike as we were in the first wave to depart, and the noon launch was on schedule.

In checking our archive, we reviewed that last year there were fewer bikes ~ just under 600, and over 1000 riders. That donation reportedly came in at over \$17,000. With no donation details available for this year, we can only hope that Special Olympics will benefit as well this time.

Bruce & Betsy

Learn more at <http://www.specialolympics.org/> or <http://www.specialolympicsarizona.org>

