

1,100 bikers raise \$52,000

Motorcycle rally raises thousands for burn survivors

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Matt Miller of Pasadena loves being a firefighter and he loves riding his motorcycle.

Charles Funk — For The Capital More than 1,100 riders take off Saturday in the annual motorcycle rally for the Mid-Atlantic Burn Camp in Harrisonburg, Va. Organized by County Fire Department Paramedic Matt Miller and the Anne Arundel Professional Firefighters Burn Foundation, the event raised \$52,000 this year. It seemed only natural to combine his two passions to help raise money for those in need.



So seven years ago, he organized a motorcycle rally fundraiser for the Mid-Atlantic Burn Camp in Harrisonburg, Va. Dozens of motorcyclists gathered for the 40-mile bike ride, with everyone donating money to the camp for young burn survivors from all over the East Coast.

"It's just grown huge from there," said Miller, a career paramedic with the county Fire Department and an Army staff sergeant with the National Guard.

Saturday's ride raised \$52,000, about double what was raised last year. Nearly 1,100 bikers hit the pavement in support of the cause.

Miller himself is no stranger to helping others. During his second tour of Iraq in 2007, he earned a Bronze Star for saving a 6-year-old girl who had been struck by a sniper's bullet.

He spent both tours organizing the event from overseas with the help of his wife, Ronda, at home in Pasadena.

"I'm a fireman and a biker, so I might as well raise some money doing both," he said.

The ride started Saturday at Cancun Cantina in Hanover and crossed over the Bay Bridge at noon sharp. Police shut down two lanes of the bridge so the thousands of bikers could make the trip in one large pack.

The bikers then stopped at Red Eye's Dock Bar on Kent Island before heading west again and ending the trip at Bamboo Bernie's in Pasadena. A raffle was held in the evening at Cancun Cantina, with dozens of local businesses donating about \$10,000 in prizes.

"In a time of a recession, when a lot of folks don't have the money and a lot of businesses are going under, there are people still donating," Miller said.

The bikers each paid a \$25 fee, which goes right to the camp.

"The great thing about bikers is they always pull together, especially for stuff like this," said Dave Peterson, general manager of Eastern Performance Cycles in Gambrills.

The store, which sells Harley Davidsons and equipment for motorcycles, has donated money to the event for at least five years. Peterson declined to say how much the business contributed this year.

"We try to help out whenever we can," said Peterson, who planned to ride for the first time this year.

Tom Sylvester, owner of ASAP Printing in Millersville, can hardly contain his excitement when talking about the annual event. His print shop donates the signature orange T-shirts the bikers wear for the ride.

"The great thing about this is that we know the money is going directly to those kids," said Sylvester, himself a veteran motorcycle rider. "Bikers aren't bad people. They'll reach into their pockets when they know it's for a good cause."

Tonas Kalil, co-director of the burn camp, said the Anne Arundel Professional Firefighters Burn Foundation has donated to the camp for years. Every year, the firefighters sponsor each Baltimore-area child treated for burn-related injuries at Johns Hopkins Burn Center, and that ends up being around \$1,000 per child, Kalil said.

The foundation also contributes to image awareness campaigns to educate the public about burns.

"We have a very long association with the Anne Arundel Firefighters Association," said Kalil, who runs the camp with co-director Linda French. "We started 21 years ago, and they have been supportive pretty much from the beginning."

Miller, though, was the true impetus for the annual motorcycle ride, Kalil said.

"The whole time he was in Iraq, he was organizing the motorcycle ride," Kalil said. "I find that extremely commendable."

And his hard work has clearly paid off, he said.

"It's just exploded," Kalil said.