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ABATE debate much ado about nothing

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REPORTER

What was anticipated to be a wild and noisy weekend with the ABATE spring opener in town, proved to be a busy but quiet kickoff to summer. Months of debate over the expected impact from a crowd of bikers, rivaling Goldendale's population, proved much ado about nothing. The town welcomed something more than 1,000 people who came to town for a three-day event that provided a much needed economic shot in the arm.

According to Klickitat County Sheriff Rick McComas, everything went well. McComas had voiced his concerns about hosting the event this year, citing lack of sufficient notice to budget funds for the event. But the county commissioners gave their approval, and McComas did more research on what to expect.

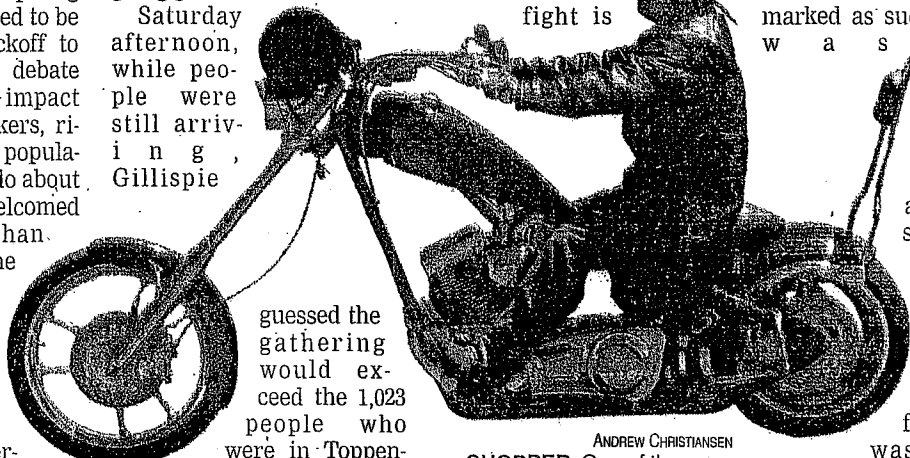
"I called around to the other host counties and the one thing I learned was that lots of communication was key," said McComas. And communicate they did with regular meetings leading up to the event.

ABATE state coordinator, Mick Gillispie, of Puyallup,

also credited communication as being important for a successful event.

"This was a test," said Gillispie. "Everything is going great."

Saturday afternoon, while people were still arriving, Gillispie



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CHOPPER: One of the more than 170 parade entries.

guessed the gathering would exceed the 1,023 people who were in Toppenish last year. It will be up to the ABATE board of directors to decide if the group will ask to return next year.

"Scott Robinson was a big promoter of Goldendale and sold us on coming here this year. What drew us are the great things around here, like Stonehenge, Maryhill Winery, Huntington's, the

windmills and the observatory. There is something for everybody. We also like

the bathrooms and size of the fairgrounds. The people have been great to work with," said Gillispie.

ABATE is an organization that fights for personal

rights, primarily of motorcycle enthusiasts. But, Gillispie likes to say they are fighting for everyone's freedom. Their fight is

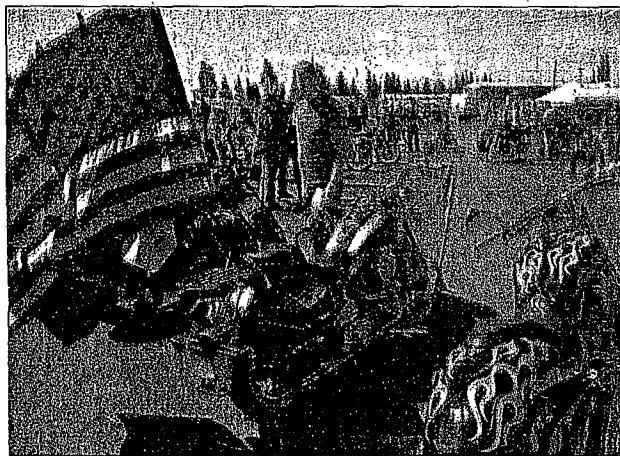
who run the gate. The Crusaders are a separate organization with many joint members. The second level is ABATE's own security, which wasn't obviously marked as such. The third

was Phoenix Security out of Yakima. They are a professional, uniformed security company who has worked with ABATE at previous events. The fourth level was the local sheriff and police. Sheriff's deputies had a presence inside and outside the event.

Most of the activities took place at the fairgrounds. ABATE members
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"We're just everyday people."

Mick Gillispie
ABATE state coordinator



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TOUGH CHOICE: It was difficult to choose the top bikes at ABATE's Saturday show at the fairgrounds. The public was invited to help judge the best in seven categories.

carried on through legislative efforts.

ABATE depends on its membership to carry on the fight. They do not have a paid staff or lobbyist. They have learned to develop a relationship with legislators, and Gillispie says the legislators are glad to see them coming. Two pieces of legislation that drew ABATE attention this year deal with malfunctioning turn lane lights and helmet laws. They have had some success with the lights, but the jury is still out on the helmet laws. Changes that were requested by the Washington State Patrol (WSP) go into effect July 26. ABATE expects legal battles over that law.

This was the group's 31st spring opener and it was apparent they have had a lot of practice. There are 21 chapters of ABATE, with two more to be added this year. Several of the chapters take responsibility for various duties that make spring opener run smoothly.

There was plenty of security for the event, not only outside where local police and sheriff deputies were joined by WSP, but also internally. According to Gillispie, "We wouldn't have security if it wasn't required."

There were four levels of security, according to Gillispie. The first level was the Christian Crusaders,

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were seen making frequent grocery and refreshment runs to town, but there was never an overwhelming presence downtown. And, there were no problems downtown, according to Goldendale Police Chief, Rick Johnson.

There were plenty of events to keep the group occupied, much like any convention. There were bike games on the fairgrounds, and a bike and car show in the parking lot east of the fairgrounds. Jackie Culver, chapter coordinator from the North Kitsap chapter which was in charge of the show said there were 47 entries in seven categories. They were hoping more of the public would have participated. Voting on best antique, cruiser, sport, chopper, bagger, rat, and trike was open to anyone who visited the show.

Following the show was the parade through town, which included about 170 bikes and trikes, much fewer than the hundreds of bikes many residents expected.

Poker runs and a Friday Columbia Gorge run to benefit the local PALS youth organization were the off-site events. Everything else was self contained, including food and entertainment.

Aside from quite a few more bikes than normal around town, it was pretty much a normal weekend in Goldendale. Little League played their tournament. The Kiwanis had Golf for

Kids, and ABATE had its spring rally. None of the three groups created a public nuisance. All three groups provided economic benefits to the community.

Said Gillispie, "We're just everyday people. The Hollywood image is not what we are about." They seemed to fit in quite well in Goldendale.



OPINION

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Thanks for ABATE support

To the Editor:

I would like to thank the Goldendale community for the show of support for the Spring A.B.A.T.E. motorcycle rally. My husband and I have been going to these rallies since 1998. We are local business owners here in Goldendale, and the amount of business the motorcyclists brought in to our community in three days was wonderful. Many bikers came from six hours away to attend, and they were very impressed with the beauty of our area, the great rides they were able to take, and the friendly people in the community. I'm sure they will visit us again and spend their hard-earned dollars in our local businesses.

Our fairgrounds are beautiful and the employees do an amazing job keeping it that way; they should be commended. We are hoping that the community will support another rally next year for the Washington State A.B.A.T.E.