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Planning a Poker Run?

Thoughts and Suggestions on Fund-Ride Planning and Management

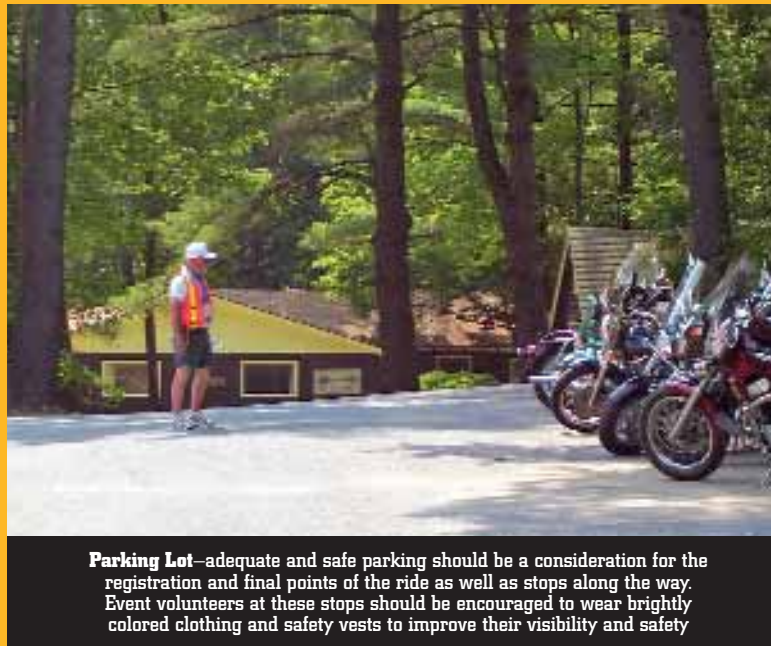
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Most of us have participated in poker runs and other charity fund-drive motorcycle rides. Many of us have also been involved in the planning of, and preparation for, these rides. Rides don't just "happen". And if you've ever been involved on the planning end of a charity ride, needless to say, you know the events that run the smoothest are those that have had the most forethought and preparation well in advance.

Therefore, if you are asked to serve on the committee—or in some instances, BE the committee—for a charity ride, the best place to start is to begin asking questions. Some to start with are: Who in your area has the most successful charity rides? What do they do that makes them special? Also, ask about the rides people have been on that have not gone over so well. Why were they not as successful or efficiently run as other rides? Many GWRRA Members and other riders you know have a lot of knowledge stored inside their noggins, and all you have to do is begin asking to get them to share that information with you. After all, we all know that riders have opinions and are willing to let you know them!

Speaking from Experience

When I had my first opportunity to be the lead planner for a Chapter poker run, I did just that and started asking questions. Over the ensuing years, I developed a mental checklist of what worked, what did not work, things that were essential, and how to start piecing all that together. The planning I was involved with even reached a point that other riders and other motorcycle organizations started asking me questions about my Chapter's experiences. They asked what we found that worked and how best to plan for a fun, successful, well-attended charity ride. That's when



Parking Lot—adequate and safe parking should be a consideration for the registration and final points of the ride as well as stops along the way. Event volunteers at these stops should be encouraged to wear brightly colored clothing and safety vests to improve their visibility and safety

I realized that this information is a value to all of us, and I started to move my planning thoughts and mental notes to paper.

Many of you may have other bullets and "pointers" that you find would be great additions to this list. If so, please share them with me, your Chapter Members, other motorcycle organizations and other riders. After all, the more well-run motorcycle events we see on the road, the more: (1) good events we can all participate in as riders; and (2) positive motorcycle events that the general public will see.

The pointers I share in this article are focused on the premise of a card-based ride, with stops along the way to "draw" playing cards. Many of the planning features would also be applicable for other fundraising rides that do not use the playing card concept.

Poker Run Pointers:

- Charity rides are VERY weather dependant. You may have picture-perfect weather for a ride and have a great turnout—but you also may have planned for a great turnout, only to have rain or extreme temperatures and a very low turn-out.

Depending on what you have laid out in funds for food, prizes, and the like, bad weather might have you *losing* money rather than *making* money!

- Another "business issue" to consider is liability. If someone has an accident during the ride you are sponsoring, your organization could be liable and sued—

even if you had that person sign a release when they fill out their application. And **YES, you should have everyone who participates sign a release.**

Liability insurance is available to organizations for a one-time event like your ride. It can be purchased—and usually at a reasonable fee—to cover the event and give the planning organization peace-of-mind for the event and its participating riders.

- Pre-planning and set-up is the key for success. Remember, the ride route and the poker game are only part of it. You also want to have a **50/50 raffle** when they sign up so that not only your organization is making money but that you'll also be able to give some away.



Small Group—some organized fundraising rides keep all the participants in one group. The author prefers to allow smaller groups of participants to register and follow the route at their own speed since each rider has a different riding comfort level. Large groups of motorcycles are much more difficult to coordinate.

You can also have a “**guess the mileage for a buck**” game where you have a graph full of mileage numbers and, for a buck, someone can buy a square. Then the person who bought the square closest to the actual mileage wins \$20. Again, it is part of the enjoyment of the day for the participants; plus, your organization makes a few extra dollars and, at the end of the day, the people who came to your event are watching you give away money.

You want to **plan for food, soft drinks, and water at the end point** of the ride. This gives everyone—both the event organizers and the participants—the opportunity to have some social time that will include talking about their fun day. This social time also affords you the opportunity to sell more 50/50 chances before the drawing.

Also, either at the beginning of the run or at the end, have a table where participants can buy an extra card to try and improve their hand.

Don't short-change your charity either. What are you raising money for by holding the ride? Is it the Ride for Kids™, the Shriners' Burn Fund, or a local charity, or to support your Chapter's efforts in the community? Have a table set up at both the registration point and the end point that has information on your chosen charity. What they do; how people can become involved to help the charity; and why it is important to the community and each of the participants.

- Spend quality time on planning the proposed route. Plan on a route between 90-120 miles long. Take time in planning and running your route well in advance to **limit the number of left-hand turns**. Right-hand turns are safer; people who are following your directions are not crossing traffic with left-hand turns.

Ride it several times and have different people ride the route following your directions. This way, if there are any problems on the route, you know about them ahead of time, like “watch out for merging traffic at the Route 32 on-ramp...”. (If you write down the route directions and are the only one who goes out to “shake them down”, then you already know the route and may overlook small issues within the route that someone else may pick up.) I once was on a poker ride that the third or fourth turn read “LEFT”, and it should have read “RIGHT.” That makes for unhappy people who paid to come on your ride!

Ride the route one or two days before the poker run to ensure that construction didn't begin that you don't know about. There should be no surprises for any of the riders on the day of the ride.

Have someone ride the route after the last participant has left (to sweep the route). As he or she makes each stop, the people working the stops pick up and go with that rider. This tells your volunteers that they can now head to where the food is. It also helps to find any participants who may have broken down along the way. Plus, sending this “sweeper” after registration has closed will give you the final timing of the route at the end. When your sweeper

arrives, everyone who registered and left the starting point has had ample time to complete the route.

The possibility of that telephone call to one of your emergency numbers or your sweeper finding a participant broken down brings up another point—**have access to a trailer or truck** that can retrieve broken down participants. Is it the host's responsibility to rescue a participant who has broken down? No. Will the host organization's efforts to assist a stranded participant make points with everyone involved with the ride? You betcha! Both an effort to assist—or the lack of an effort to assist—will be long remembered after the event.

- Checkpoint preparations are important tasks. When each participant registers (and both riders and passengers sign a ride release form), have them draw a playing card. Also, **have coffee and donuts waiting for them at the registration point**. It's a nice welcome to show up and be greeted and offered something warm (or cold) to drink. It also gives them the opportunity to socialize as the ride registration is taking place.

On their registration form, the top section is for personal contact information like name, address, riding organization, email address, etc. On the bottom of the form are 6 blank playing cards. When participants register, they reach into the bag and pull out a card. The person at the registration table writes in one of the blank cards what the card is and initials the form.

Some rides I have been on keep everyone together and leave as one large group.

I don't think this is the best way to go about it because a large group is more difficult to coordinate, plus each rider has their own riding comfort level. To counter that, have registration from 9-11:00 a.m. (for example) and, **as people come in with their own groups, let them leave.** Then they can follow your directions and do the route at their own speed.

Make sure to tell them on the directions a time that food and prizes will be given out at the end. This way, if they stop for sightseeing or anything else, they know when to be back. Add some time into the route so that those who leave at the close of registration still have time to enjoy the ride before having to be at the end point (which could be the same place as the beginning or a different location).

Have emergency telephone numbers on the directions. These can be someone's cell or, if you're using the same place for both the start and the finish (like a fire station, business, or civic club building), that phone number works too. Plus, this allows the participants a contact point if they have run into challenges, or have broken down, gotten lost, etc.

Plan on three stops along the route. Try to have the stops (as nearly as possible) evenly placed throughout the route. Have each stop where the participants can use restroom facilities and buy a coffee, soda, or candy bar. Gas station stops, convenience stores, donut shops, ice cream barns, etc., are all good options.

I have even been on some charity rides where the original organizers work with other groups to plan for stops that help the secondary organization. For example, a church or fire station could be used as a ride stop and then that organization sells coffee and donuts to the visiting riders.

We have all seen the parking lots of local taverns filled with motorcycles, but **bar-rooms are not the best alternative for motorcycle ride stops.** Yes, you can buy soft drinks and coffee at that tavern, but not all those who ride make the best refreshment choices for safe riding.

As you are planning the ride and the route, **visit each of your proposed stopping points and meet with the people responsible for those facilities.** There may be a legitimate reason that they may not want motorcycles stopping at their facility that day. It is much easier to get prior approval so everyone looks good the day of the charity ride than to have your volunteers confronted the very day of the event and asked to move.

At each stop, the participants draw another card and the ride volunteers write down the number on each motorcyclist's



Where to stop—while planning your route, pick stopping points that will allow your participants the opportunity for a comfort break that has restroom facilities and a place to get something to eat and drink.

registration form. One of the logistical needs becomes sets of playing cards and workers at each stop. Also, you'll need simple things like paper bags to put the cards into in order to shake them up before drawing. And you'll need something to write with on the registration forms.

In addition, remind your workers to bring something to occupy themselves during the lulls. (Playing solitaire with the cards all day may become a little stale!) They should also think about folding chairs if the stop does not have benches, picnic tables, or other accommodations.

Safety should be a concern for all your site workers as well. Encourage them to wear fluorescent traffic vests to give them higher visibility. That visibility is not only for their safety with traffic but also visibility for the arriving riders.

Have informational flyers about your Chapter and GWRRA, about your charity, and about the day's events at each of the stops. During the course of the day, each stop's volunteers will be approached by non-participants curious about what is going on. The volunteers can become great ambassadors for your Chapter and GWRRA and for motorcycles in general.

More Particulars of Organizing

At the end of the ride, the riders draw their final card (and buy an extra card if they wish) so they may have up to six different cards.

- How much to charge for your entry fee? I've been on rides that were \$10, \$15, \$20.

Is the fee per bike or per person? What will the "economy of the region" accept as a charge? You don't want to scare away riders with too high of an entry fee.

- What are the prizes awarded for at the end of the ride? Use your imagination: Best hand/worst hand (if it is playing card based), 2nd place, 3rd place, farthest traveled, oldest rider, youngest rider, or other categories that may tickle someone's sense of humor.

You want the riders to come back for your next event, so try to have prizes for as many people as possible. Solicit door prizes from area businesses and get your Members to get door prizes like hats, T-shirts, oil, gift certificates, and whatever else they can get. When the participants register, have the two halves of a raffle ticket stapled to the registration. Take one half and place it in a coffee can for a later drawing. The other ticket is their "meal ticket" and also their door prize claim ticket.

After everyone has left the registration point, start drawing numbers from the coffee can and start stapling them to the door prizes. You can also make a display board that lists the winning numbers and the corresponding prize. Then, as people finish the ride, check in, and wait for others to return, they can check out the door prize table to see if their ticket has won anything.

The other option for door prizes is to draw the winning tickets after everyone has returned from the ride. But this can be very time consuming.

Try to get a few "special" door prizes and

hold them for a “public drawing.” For instance, we always seemed to have a few very gaudy, frilly donations from Fredrick’s of Hollywood (likely items the store couldn’t sell and had banished to the bottom of a display drawer). So, while awarding the poker prizes, 50/50 drawing, mileage guess, etc, we had a “special drawing” and had the person open it in front of the crowd. It becomes a prize that will always be remembered and brings lots of laughs to the event!

- **Parking lot etiquette.** Is there room for everyone to park (safely) at both the registration point and the end point? Have a bunch of kickstand blocks made up and thrown around. This helps for both gravel lots and lots with fresh asphalt. Also, try to avoid the mob mentality and have a parking lot that advocates some organization to the parking. This way riders can get in and out as they please without the duress of squeezing between other closely corralled motorcycles.

Remember, if the riders have fun at registration, during the route, at the stops, and at your end point—they will be back the next

time you plan a ride! How the event is organized and managed—and how the participants feel they have been treated—become part of your organization’s reputation.

- **Feeding the troops.** Participants like to eat, and you need to have enough food to feed everyone, but it is difficult to figure out how much food to have prepared. On the ride I described earlier (that had given us the wrong directions), by the time we arrived at the end nearly all the food was gone, the prizes had already been given out, and people were starting to leave. That’s what we wound up remembering about that organization’s charity ride.

Remember, if someone has a good time, they’ll tell a couple of people. But if they have a lousy time, they will tell a lot of people!

Getting back to the food, it’s tough to guess how much is enough. For a few years, we did pasta but worried about either running out of it or ending up with lots of leftovers. We’ve had the most success with

burgers and hot dogs and associated munchies that can easily accompany them. In your planning stages, get several grills reserved. After registration is complete, you have a good idea of how many people came to the ride and how many you should expect back at the end. You then have some time—as the sweeper is making his route—to send someone out to buy the meat and rolls. The “main course” is your biggest expense, so if you can buy these supplies with actual registration figures you are less apt to overspend.

For dessert, have Members of your organ-

ization events” section? Many local papers will print submitted pictures. Do you have a picture from last year’s ride? Write out some copy that invites the media to your next ride. Also send in a picture after the ride to the local paper that talks about your organization, your event, and your charitable endeavors.

- **Send thank-you notes and save the registration forms.** Did someone give you a door prize, volunteer to help, donate food, or help your event in some other way? Then thank them.



Working at Stop—your volunteers at every point of your ride become ambassadors for your organization and for motorcyclists in general!

ization make them so they can be put out at the end luncheon. Another pointer is to make a big tossed (garbage bag) salad (made by putting all the chopped-up salad fixings into a CLEAN garbage bag, with or without the salad dressing, and shaking them around). Afterward, you can dish the salad into either individual bowls or large serving bowls for the participants. Also, have soft drinks and water available at the end location.

If people go home with a full belly, they’ll be happy. And if they got a door prize, they’ll be even happier!

- **Get the word out** so you have a good cross section of participants from your motorcycle community. You can invite local car clubs too. Put up flyers in bike shops, shopping malls, and local convenience stores. Use the web and plug your ride on message boards and via emails to all the riders and motorcycle organizations that you know.

Are there local radio stations or newspapers that will list your ride in their “com-

Thank them at the ride when you are giving out the prizes; then thank them again later with a personalized written note. Yes, just like your mother made you do years ago—because she was RIGHT! Next year, these people will remember that note they got in the mail and be more apt to help again. After all, it only costs postage and a few minutes of your time.

Registration forms have a lot of valuable information available on them. Specifically, who was there and what their address is. This information becomes the basis for next year’s mailing—

the people and the other ride organizations that participated this time. And again, when someone receives your flyer in the mail or electronically, if they had a good time this year, they are going to bring that flyer to other riders’ attention. They’ll say things like, “I had a great time at this ride. We should go!” That is the best possible advertising for your organization and for your charity ride.

Conclusion

There is a lot of “behind the scenes” work that goes on before, during, and after a well-run charity ride. And know that, in any Chapter, there are Members who do not function well in the spotlight. But these are the people who may be your best resource for the details that need to be done throughout the planning and operation of your event. So tap into their skills and recognize all your Members for the work they have done—because it takes them all to put on a successful motorcycle charity ride.

One last thought: On the day of the event, never forget that the biggest reason you are all there is to have fun! Good luck! ●