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Memorial motorcycle ride reaches 10th anniversary

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In the 10 years since Nick Jennings died in a rollover car accident in Hollis, his father takes comfort in all the children who have been helped in his son's name.

"In losing my son, I was looking for a way to deal with the grief and frustration, so we put together a motorcycle ride to benefit the schools because there was such an outpouring of support," Dave Jennings said.

He said the ride was made possible through the support of friends and family and his motorcycle chapter, Gate City H.O.G.

"It was so successful, we decided to do it every year," he said.

The 10th anniversary of the Nicholas "Nick" Jennings Memorial Ride is set for Saturday, July 26. Proceeds go to scholarships to benefit students from the Hollis, Brookline, Nashua, Merrimack and Hudson communities.

"This should be a banner year," said Jennings. He said the rides have been very successful to date, raising \$30,000 in scholarships and setting up perpetual funds in five communities. Jennings hopes to add a sixth community after this ride.

Money raised initially went to the Hollis/Brookline communities, but so many people from other towns participated in the fundraising efforts, that Jennings said he decided to include them as well.

"Community involvement has grown steadily over the years. Each year we seem to find all new support," Jennings said. The community helps through donations, sponsorships and providing raffle prizes. He said Tyler Mclaughlin from "Wicked Tuna" has donated another trip to the raffle this year. Mclaughlin's show airs on National Geographic, and his donated trip for a fishing expedition aboard the Pinwheel tuna fishing boat is valued at \$3,500.

"The support grows every year. Carrabba's has been a huge support feeding people – before that, I used to grill for everyone," Jennings said. He said Fred Alter of A&E Jewelers in Merrimack has been a big help selling the 50-50 raffle tickets.

"The biggest way to get involved and to support is through raffle tickets. Whether a motorcycle enthusiast or not, there's a lot to participate in the day of the ride," he said.

Jennings said the number of riders can depend on the weather.

"We average about 125/130 motorcycles per year, but we never know until the day of the ride," he said.

Registration begins at 8 a.m. at the 101-A Wal-Mart in Amherst, and closes at 9:45. The ride leaves at 10 a.m.

"It's a 90 mile ride to the west and back around. It ends at Alpine Grove (in Hollis) where all the registrants gather for lunch, along with a live band, Old No. 7 Band," he said.

He said the Gate City H.O.G Chapter has helped since the beginning. Members volunteer as road captains, aided by community police.

"Through each stop light last year we never put our feet down because the local police were there to assist us. It's an amazing feeling to do our 90 miles without having our feet on the ground except for scheduled stops," he said.

Jennings said Nick, who died at age 16, was into motorcycles as well as sports.

"He played football and baseball, but was a huge lacrosse fan," he said.

Part of memorializing Nick is choosing scholarship recipients who reflect his personality and charisma, according to Jennings. He said he tries to target kids who aren't the typical straight-A students.

"We look for kids who are hardworking, well rounded ... these are the kids we want to help, to give them that extra boost."

Jennings said they work closely with the schools' guidance department to choose recipients.

"The guidance department makes the final choice because they know the students best."

"Money from this year goes to scholarships for next spring, the rest goes into a trust," he said. The trust fund grows while distributions are made.

In 2014, one student from each of the five participating communities, Hollis, Brookline, Nashua, Merrimack and Hudson, received a \$1,000 scholarship.

After this year's ride, Jennings is considering a new initiative.

"We're looking for a new venue to help less fortunate kids," he said.

He said they may raise funds for children with disabilities, possibly to help fund the purchase of assistive devices.

More information on Nick's Ride can be found at lifesshortridehard.com.