

Bikers rally in Little Falls for Marines' Toys for Tots

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LITTLE FALLS — There's nothing like the thought of kids in need to turn Satans Soldiers into Santa's Helpers.

And that goes for a lot of the other tough guys who came roaring in on "hogs" Sunday to help the Marines Toys For Tots program inaugurate the season of charities for kids in need.

"We understand that it's a tough economic time now, but people still came out to show their support," said Mark Davis, the sergeant at arms of the New Jersey chapter of Satans Soldiers MC, a motorcycle club. He was among hundreds of donors and helpers who joined a team of Marines throughout the day in preparing donated toys at the Great Notch Inn off Route 46 west.

Black leather, displaying motorcycle club emblems — Satans Soldiers MC, Brick City

collects new, unwrapped toys from October to mid-December each year to donate to needy children during the holiday season. The Marines say the toys will be distributed to local organizations in the area on a need-by-need basis.

Braving frigid riding weather, the bikers — mostly men — came from all over, some traveling from South Jersey and even Rockland County, N.Y. True to their tough image, most discounted their personal effort.

"In this economy, it always good to help out people who don't have funds to give their kids toys," said Monaco, adding that in the end "everyone just wants to see a kid smile."

Tony Gerardi of Mayem MC, one of the sponsors of the event, said the outcome was better than he expected.

"It's great to see all these people come out even in the cold," said Gerardi. "It's all about the kids."

Former Marine Keith Small said he joined Satan Soldiers because he wanted to keep the esprit de corps he had in the Marines. "I wanted to join the club and still have that brotherhood," said Small, who also is president of the club.



Riders MC, Iron Demons MC, Sixth Boro MC among the two dozen clubs on hand — was complemented by cool shades and fistfuls of beer bottles at the event.

But the tough exteriors belied the gentle mission: The four Marines from Dover-based Golf Co., 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines showed up to collect the bags of toys starting at noon. By 2 p.m. their white minivan was overflowing with plastic bags, and the leathernecks had to make two trips to bring back about 1,000 toys.

"If we can't support the Marines, who can we support?" said one of the sponsors, Nutley MC president Steve Bernardo.

"We are out here to show support to these guys who are veterans," said retired Marine Gunnery Sgt. Mario Monaco about the several 100 men, women and children who packed the lively inn, helping out with bagging the toys and distributing the foods.

Toys for Tots, a national U.S. Marine Corps Reserve program that started in 1947,



Schizo Boettinger of Iron Demons said he was impressed with the Marines and that the clubs could relate to their senses of solidarity and camaraderie: "They stand up for each other and they are just like us: hardworking men, family men that know what this is all about."

Gyro Giarrusso of Brick City Riders MC NJ, another of the event's eight sponsors, brought his whole family to the event. His wife, Toni, who said the family often comes to such events, marvelled, "It's been a beautiful turnout, and it's good to see families come out and join together for a good cause."

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