



Bennie Swepson, known as "Bennie the Rider" has owned 19 different motorcycles since 1944.

RIDING INTO THE SUNSET

BY FELECIA P. MCMILLAN, PH. D. THE CHRONICLE

'Bennie the Rider' retires his wheels after 60 years

His name is Bennie Swepson, but he is affectionately known as "Bennie the Rider" around the Triad. A native of Winston-Salem, he has also lived in New York, Washington, D.C., and Detroit. Now 79, Swepson has decided to hang up his riding gear and reflect on the memories.

Since 1944, he has owned 19 different motorcycles. He used them to travel to various rallies and trips. His love of motorcycling has been a major part of his life. He rode his bike each day. His wife, Amy, is glad to hear that he is considering retirement from biking.

"Sixty years is a long time to do anything," said Amy Swepson.

Bennie Swepson learned how to ride a motorcycle when he was working in Washington, D.C., as a messenger for the Postal Service. Riding the motorcycle was a part of his job, but this task was no chore for Swepson. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II as sergeant major first class.

"I immediately fell in love with the motorcycle. It is the love of my life," he said. "When I am on my motorcycle, I feel good. I feel free. If the motor is running good, and I'm riding good, I feel free. I think about God all the time when I'm on my bike. It's just me, the wind and God."

Swepson enjoys listening to music as he eases on down the line. He sings and listens to his eight-track system and responds to his CB radio and tape deck. He loves to listen to gospel music. His "handle" is "Bennie the Rider," of course.

Swepson has owned nine Harley-Davidsons, two Indians,

five GoldWings and two 750s. He currently owns a red and maroon 1500 GoldWing. All of his bikes have been of different colors.

Bennie the Rider was a member of the Central Carolina Riders Motorcycle Club in the 1960s and 1970s. He retired from R.J. Reynolds in 1988. He is currently a member of the Original 12th out of Greensboro.

He recently donated 100 of his trophies, to the Greensboro Club. He still has several plaques and large trophies in his den that designate his first-place prizes at various rallies and for being the oldest rider among the cyclists.

He received three trophies from the New Ladies, Too Ride Motorcycle Club in Greensboro. He won first place as the oldest rider in 1998, 2000 and 2002.

Swepson has participated in various contests in which he performed such stunts as the plank ride, the slow ride or the fast ride. The fastest that he has gone on his bike is around 115 mph.

"I wasn't racing anybody at the time. I was just rolling on the road. I had no fear. It was just something to do to make riding more enjoyable," said Swepson.

Robert Duckett, currently a member of the CC Riders, knows the reputation of this veteran of the highway.

"Bennie the Rider needs no explanation. Everybody has seen him. Everybody knows him," said Duckett.

Swepson is known for his various stunts. He often rides sideways, backward and even standing up.

"I made these stunts up. It was just a way to keep the fun in it."

Now that times have changed, his interest in riding has waned.

"Riding was once a lot of fun, but it is not fun now, not like it used to be. We would just ride to different places, turn around and come back. Our wife or girlfriend would fix a box of food. We would take our drinks, our beer or other beverages and put them on ice," said Swepson.

"We would take off on Saturday and come back on Sunday. We might go to Reidsville, Greensboro, High Point, Martinsville or Thomasville. Back then, it didn't matter what kind of bike you rode. Now you have to ride a certain brand of motorcycle to be accepted."

"I moved back to Winston-Salem in 1961 from New York. I would go to the bike rally in D.C. every year. Riders would stop and help one another on the road if they needed help. Today, we can't do that," said Swepson. "You might get killed if you stop and help somebody today. The world is just turned upside down. The last time, God sent his Son to straighten things out. This time, I think God is gonna have to come down himself."

Swepson's advice to new-riders is: "Drive safely. Riding a motorcycle is like driving a car. You have to watch out for the other man as well as for yourself. People often ignore motorcycles on the road. They claim they don't see motorcycles. You can't play with traffic out there."

In order to be safe, Bennie the Rider rides only when the weather permits.

"I avoid rainy weather because the road is slippery when it is wet. Motorcyclists have to be concerned just like car drivers," Swepson said.



Swepson

Robinson, Joines send troops in Iraq popcorn

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Troops serving in Iraq received \$2,000 worth of popcorn care of Mayor Allen Joines and City Council member Vernon Robinson. Several boxes of microwave butter popcorn were purchased from Cub Scout Pack 747 and sent to a unit stationed in the Middle East.

"We just felt like it was a neat way of doing two things - supporting the troops a little bit during the holiday season and also help that Cub Scout pack in trying to raise some money," said Joines.

Cub Scout Pack 747 is affiliated with Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church.

Patrick Kelly, who is the Cub Scout pack master, says the money raised will benefit some of the 30 Cubs who can't afford to pay for all of the dues, camp fees, uniforms and field trips.

"We have a lot of kids in our pack who have single moms," said Kelly. "Our pack put a little over \$3,000 in the bank. We do a trip in the spring usually to some historical site, and this will help defray some of the cost."

The Cubs, he says, were excited that the popcorn was sent to men and women stationed in Iraq. The popcorn they'll receive, he says, is their biggest seller and it can be ordered year-round.

"We just thought that was great. Everybody wins. The pack makes some money, and the fact that it was going to the troops really thrilled (the Cubs)," said Kelly. "It was very generous of the mayor and Vernon (Robinson) to do this.... It helps out the troops over there and the little Cubbies over here."



Council member Vernon Robinson

News Clips

Compiled from staff wire and submitted reports

ACC history class to be offered at Forsyth Tech

Forsyth Technical Community College has an opportunity for ACC fans to learn about the history of the Atlantic Coast Conference. The college is offering a class, History of ACC Basketball, Jan. 24 through

March 14 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The class will be held in the auditorium at Forsyth Tech's West Campus, located at 1300 Bolton Street.

The cost of the class is \$75. Barry Lawing, author of "Demon Deacon Hoops" and a Forsyth Tech American history and Western civilization instructor, will teach the class.

Scheduled speakers include former ACC players and coaches Skip Brown, Tommy Burleson, Charlie Davis, Bill Guthridge and Carl Tacy.

To register for the History of ACC Basketball class, call 61-1002.

Forsyth County Progressive Democrats

The Forsyth County Progressive Democrats will complete their precinct organization plans at their next meeting at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 12, at the Hanes Mall Golden Corral. All are welcome. People are also invited to join with the group for supper at 7 p.m.

Students, parents can explore financial-aid options at workshops

Students and parents can explore financial-aid and scholarship options for college during two workshops offered by Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools.

Workshops will be held Monday, Jan. 10, and Thursday, Jan. 20. Both will begin at 7 p.m. and will be held in the school district's Administrative Office Center auditorium, 1605 Miller Street in Winston-Salem.

Parents and students are encouraged to attend one of the workshops. The programs will cover information about the financial-aid process, including the FAFSA and school and community resources for scholarships. Local college and community financial-aid representatives will be present, as well as high school counselors.

For more information, students can contact their school guidance counselor or call 727-2912.

Alums can now join WSSU association with plastic

The WSSU National Alumni association recently announced a new and convenient service for alumni: They can now pay memberships via credit/debit card.

The membership form can be obtained from the alumni Web site at www.wssu.edu/alumni1 (WSSU National Alumni Association - Membership Application) or the Alumni Office. Once completed, the form can then be faxed to the Alumni Office at (336) 750-3134.

Some benefits of membership in the Alumni Association include networking opportunities with other alumni, quarterly issues of The Battering Ram (official newsletter), discounts on school paraphernalia at the WSSU Bookstore, and discounts on alumni paraphernalia.

Regular membership dues are \$50 year. Life memberships are \$800 (payable \$200 per year for four consecutive years).

Membership in the National Alumni Association helps support student scholarships and provides operating expenses for the association. All alumni of WSSU are invited to join the National Alumni Association as a show of support and commitment to their alma mater.

Retired school personnel to meet

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Unit of the N.C. Retired School Personnel will meet on Wednesday, Jan. 12, at its usual place.

Membership fees may be sent to Dr. Raymond Surbaugh or paid at the meeting. Reservations for the meal are due one week before the meeting by contacting Dorothy H. Vernon. The deadline for reporting volunteer hours for the year 2004 is set for Jan. 12, 2005 (meeting time).

Robert R. Severs is president of the unit, and Mary Jo Brewer is the secretary.

Legal Aid gets funding for immigrant outreach

The Legal Aid Society of Northwest North Carolina was recently awarded \$35,000 from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation to assist in sustaining and expanding its Immigrant Outreach Project in Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Iredell,

Stokes, Surry and Yadkin counties. The project provides free legal assistance to low-income immigrants in a wide range of civil matters, including consumer, housing, employment and family law cases.

Susan Gottsegen is the executive director of the Legal Aid Society and manages the Immigrant Outreach Project. She said: "While many low-income families have difficulty securing and keeping decent housing, and are often the victims of consumer fraud, domestic violence and employment exploitation, these problems are exacerbated for immigrants."

"The language barrier, cultural differences and a lack of understanding of their rights and responsibilities can make immigrants quite vulnerable. This program seeks to reduce exploitation through community education and legal representation."



Gottsegen

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4965 University Parkway, Winston Salem
(Silas Creek Pkwy to University Pkwy)

For accommodation of persons with special needs at sales meetings, or for more information, call 1-800-328-9875 or TDD/TTY at 1-888-451-9957. 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday.

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