

# Women on Wheels: Winona hosts international gathering

by CESAR SALAZAR

With their roaring motorbikes and leather jackets, the international Women on Wheels (WOW) motorcycle group conducted its 36th annual Ride-In in Winona July 12-14. While some of the riders might describe themselves as “grandmas who like to bake cookies and ride motorcycles,” the group focuses on two things: camaraderie and diversity.

“The extremely unique thing that we have that’s different from even other women’s motorcycle organizations is that we have not just women riders,” WOW President Carol Skala said. “You can be just an enthusiast, you can be a passenger or you can be a former rider and be a part of the group. We’re the only group — that we’re aware of — for women riding groups that welcome husbands and the wives. They’re a part of the team.”

“[WOW] doesn’t exclude men,” WOW rider Desse Johnston said. “We have tons of support members: boyfriends, husbands, friends, whatever. Men are included and they’re welcome at all our Ride-Ins and they enjoy it as much as we do.”

The group was not only diverse in members but also in motorcycles, ranging from Harley-Davidsons to Indian Motorcycles to Can-Am Spyders. The group consisted of over 250 members and rode through many different routes throughout Winona and the bluff lands.

“These roads are just beautiful for motorcycles,” WOW rider and Winonan Jo Johnson said. Johnson applied for Winona to be one of WOW’s Ride-In destinations due to



Photo by Cesar Salazar

■ Women On Wheels Rider Desse Johnston poses with her 1996 Yamaha Virago during the 36th Annual National Women On Wheels Ride-In in Winona. The close camaraderie and friendships she’s built over the years keep her coming back.

its many features and activities available for the group to do. “They could go on the lake and do the paddle wheels, do the tour boat. There were options for [things] other than just motorcycle riding.”

Some of the members even came in from some far-away places. “Some of these gals

have come a thousand miles,” Johnson said. “We got gals from Alaska, New York, and Nova Scotia, [Canada.]”

“It’s a long drive,” WOW rider Josie Vandenonder said in regard to her travels from Antigonish, Nova Scotia. “It took me four days of travel.” She continued, “I just kind

of wing it as I go. I don’t plan ahead for the hotels.”

“Riding motorcycles is a very special thing for women,” WOW rider Patti “Peppermint Patti” Bogan said. Bogan traveled from Anchorage, Alaska, for the Ride-In. “We’re women in a man’s world, but it’s changed over the years. In the years that I’ve been around, it’s changed a lot. You see more and more women out there on wheels. For a long time, we were seen as something that should be on the back or not riding at all. That’s another reason that this [group] is such a draw: The women that are here are very independent. You want to be around other women that are independent and supportive.”

The group also serves as a support network for the riders, whether it’s traveling on the road or trying to find a new adventure on the road. One WOW rider, Marilyn Vershure, explained that one time her brother’s motorcycle had broken down but was able to be recovered by another fellow WOW member, something that she wouldn’t have been able to do otherwise without the group. “That’s what the WOW spirit is about, it’s that, ‘Hey, I’m broke down. Can you help?’” Vershure said.

“There are a lot of different facets to motorcycling,” WOW rider Carol Hauck said. “That’s one of the things WOW brings together.” She continued, “WOW accepts everybody. Doesn’t matter what you ride, doesn’t matter how long you ride, it doesn’t matter what it is you want to ride ... They accept all of that. You make those fast friends with all that.”

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# Sons of Norway show and tell meeting July 26

The Winona Sons of Norway’s July meeting will be Tuesday, July 26, at 7 p.m. at Central Lutheran Church in Winona. This month’s program will take an unusual turn

in direction. Last month, Anah Munson traced the immigration of Norwegians into Cedar Valley. This month, the program director, Sylvia Pescenye, will challenge all of us to be a part of the program. This should be fun and informative. The following is the plan for the program.

The July 26 Sons of Norway program is yours! Remember kindergarten? You bring the subject of interest and get to tell the class about it.

Here’s the deal. Every one of you has something that reminds you of Norway, of your link to the Old Country: Grandma’s lefse recipe, a photo of the home farm, a homemade tool, a map or postcard, the crocheted edge of a pillowcase, or a pocket hymnal in old time script. Make a list of what you have. Then choose one item to bring and tell about to your friends in the lodge. (We will do this again and again.)

In sharing our stories, we hope to

strengthen our cultural ties with each other, here and now, in this community.

Not a drop of Norwegian blood in you? Don’t let that stop you! What draws your heart to Norway? Sardines? Bring a tin and tell.

We meet the fourth Tuesday of each month in Central Lutheran Church’s Grace Hall at 7 p.m. National anthems are first; coffee hour is last. Welkommen!

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