

Spread the Word – Publicity

*~ Jeff Harris
State Public Relations Officer*

2004 was a pretty good year for how motorcyclists were portrayed by the media here in Pennsylvania. Looking back on the past year I discovered something that surprised me. The vast majority of newspaper articles were pro-motorcycle! The newspaper reporters wrote good stories about Carlisle, Johnstown and Lehigh, they also wrote great articles about the generosity of bikers conducting fund-raisers for numerous charities. Many of the articles included good quotes from members of ABATE. Thank you all for spreading the word!

As your appointed State Public Relations Officer, I am responsible for ensuring that any negative press receives an appropriate response. Fortunately, the Press has made my job simpler by writing predominantly favorable stories. Whenever I read a well written, pro-motorcycle article, I take a few minutes to send a “thank you” e-mail to the journalist. These reporters need to know that we appreciate receiving good press, and encourage them to continue.

Accident reports are the one area where we are routinely receiving bad publicity. Many accident reports indicate excessive speed, alcohol and non-helmet use. How do we respond to these? I've contacted several reporters about accident reports that did not include any mention of helmet use. The response I got every time was “It wasn't in the police report”. I request these reporters to write follow-up stories to provide the public with more detailed information. Unfortunately, this seldom happens. When it comes to excessive speed and alcohol, there is no appropriate response. We need to police ourselves not to participate in risky or illegal behaviour. Let's save the racing for the drag strip, and don't ride drunk! If you're stupid enough to ride your motorcycle while drunk, please wear your helmet so that when you remove yourself from the gene-pool your death will not have a future effect on our freedom of choice! I know that's a harsh statement, but we've lost too many good people to alcohol related accidents.

In 2005 I would like to see even more good publicity for our organization. I only saw a few newspaper reports about ABATE related fundraisers last year. If your having a fundraiser for charity, your chapter PR officer needs to invite your local television, radio and newspapers to attend. Give the reporters at least two-to-four weeks notice of the event. This will give them time to schedule coverage. If you have your schedule of events for 2005 already completed, you can start contacting the news media now. Take some time this winter to spread the word and help ABATE of PA gain more good publicity.