

## Tornado Alley Gets Blown Away by Choppers4Children – Neosho, MO

By Val Berry

As printed in Wide Open Motorcycle Magazine, July, 2005 Issue

Anyone in Southwest Missouri knows it's risky business to plan an event in April or May during the height of tornado season. But that didn't stop Newton County Prosecuting Attorney Scott Watson from fulfilling his dream on April 30 in Neosho, MO. An estimated 6,500 people swarmed the historic Neosho Downtown Square to support this first-time bike show and rally, which netted a whopping estimate of \$42,000.00 for the Children's Miracle Network.

In the history of Wide Open, we've never witnessed such a successful first-time event! Usually there's a great deal of disorganization and chaos that seems to plague the good-hearted folks who want to support their communities with a fundraiser like this. But that was not the case here. C4C was expertly planned, streamlined, well organized and flowed throughout the day without a single glitch. Wide Open editor Ralph Roades said, "I've never seen anything like it! No one ever successfully pulls off a biker event of that magnitude his or her first go around. Wide Open Magazine made history with our hugely successful St. Louis Bike Show back in late February. And just 2 months later there we were participating in another first-time success story that has already made its mark in the Midwest biker history books. C4C just blew me away!"

Attendees were waiting in line to get in. The square was flooded with people just 15 minutes after C4C opened to the public. I'm certain that I saw Scott Watson tear up as he witnessed the unbelievable masses of people pouring through all the entry points. It was one of those poignant moments in life when one receives what I call a, "Paycheck of the heart."

Watson coupled his passion for scooters with his love and concern for children, to found C4C. Along with the help of his wife Kathy and assistant prosecutors Jake Skouby and Bill Dobbs, Watson's non-profit organization was able to make its debut. C4C provides financial support to CMN and other local children's charities.

Although Watson encountered some resistance from local officials and citizens when he first shared his vision, it wasn't long before most of the community came on board to support it. As always, with any event like this, there will be some opposition. And C4C was no exception to this rule. It was reported on a local news network that some of the area churches, while apathetic about the motorcycle event, were adamantly opposed to the idea of a beer garden. Upon hearing this, I remember thinking, "Gee, maybe if this same group of overly concerned churchgoers had been willing to cough up some \$40,000.00 in charitable contributions to support the CMN organization, there would be no need for this biker event... with or without a beer garden!" I hope these folks can relax now that it's over, knowing there were no reported incidents of drunken, raping and pillaging in their community on that day. In fact, Chief of Police David McCracken stated, "Choppers4Children was a well planned event which brought a lot of fun to our community. We experienced no real problems and I believe everyone had an excellent time. I would hope all events involving this many people would go so well." The fun-loving, peaceful atmosphere was quite amazing when you consider that the town swelled to about twice its normal population during the one-day event.

The contributions of community leaders, local businesses, and various individuals are too numerous to mention, but there are a few who went above and beyond the scope of normal giving and, I believe, deserve recognition. The Community Bank and Trust of Neosho picked up the tab for the numerous bands that performed. The Oreo Blue Band seemed to be a crowd favorite. At one point they trashed and burned a guitar on stage, which got a huge response from the crowd. After the performance, what was left of the instrument was auctioned off twice! Local businessman Dave Crocker was the first to acquire it with a bid of just under \$300. He then gave the destroyed and charred remnants of the guitar back and told them to, "Auction it off again!" After the second auctioning, another sizable amount was raised bringing the total contributions to \$430 dollars. Crocker also donated some 900 tee shirts and use of a building, which served

as bike show headquarters.

V8 Choppers of Miami, OK won top honor in the biker build-off, ousting Sick Pigs of Springfield, MO. Stan Hughes and Scot Hough, V8 Chopper co-owners, were major contributors to this event. They donated a large undisclosed amount to Watson in the early stages of planning when all involved knew there could be the possibility of this thing going belly up. Another business worthy of mention is the Stephen J. Corporation of Aurora, MO. Their generous donation of a motorcycle trailer, which was raffled off, brought in significant funds. And Buzz Ball editor of the Neosho Daily News did an outstanding job with pre and post coverage of the event.

The food was provided by The Kitchen Pass of Neosho. And it wasn't your average biker chow either. Kitchen Pass brought the good stuff. Owner Larry Gindling, donated a large portion of his proceeds to the event and worked tirelessly to keep the constant flow of hungry people fed. Others that deserve mention for their outstanding contributions are; Steve Bock, Kelner Turbine, County Auditor Charlotte Ward, Assistant Deputy Auditor Johan Bunch, the Seneca, MO Fire Department and Assistant Prosecutor Bill Dobbs.

The poker run boasted 185 participants. In addition, the bike show was a huge success. (See the insert in this article for a list of the bike show winners.) Both events were organized and overseen by Assistant Prosecutor Jake Skouby.

There was no shortage of things to do or see. There were an estimated 50 plus vendors present. Those I spoke with said they experienced outstanding sales for the day. But alas, as always, the Wide Open Booth seemed to be the hot spot on vendor row. Our magazine experienced record subscription sales (when related to attendance) and we sold out of virtually every size and style of clothing we had! In fact, early in the day, we sold out of our popular ladies wife-beaters. Customers kept asking me for, "One like you're wearing." Finally a very persistent woman and her husband managed to talk me right out of my top. That's right, I sold the shirt right off my back! I only did it because she was really cute and he was quite charming. I'm not sure but I think this act of sacrifice qualifies me for some kind of dedicated sales person award or something. (Are you reading this Ralph?) By 5:00 pm, with 5 hours to go, our inventory was depleted and our booth looked like a tornado really had hit the place. We simply had nothing left to sell, however. I believe this may have been largely due to the tireless efforts of one man, Tom Workman of the Public Works Department. I lost track of the friends and acquaintances he dragged, without mercy, to our booth during the few spare minutes he had here and there. I didn't even have to go through the sales pitch. Tom already had them sold!

Hmm, what is it about the Wide Open booth that draws such a crowd? Is it the fact that we have a highly acclaimed, nationally published magazine? Perhaps it's our unique tee shirts, or the chance to win a Harley. It could also be Ralph's magnetic personality that causes the crowd to swarm us like bees on honey. But who really knows? We've heard rumors that while it may be a little of each of the above (although the part about Ralph might be a gross exaggeration) it might have something to do with the Wide Open Girls.

C4C not only brought out the locals and folks from surrounding communities, but also boasted visitors from as far away as California and Montana. I'd like to think that Wide Open had a hand in that due to the full-page advertisement Watson chose to run in our April issue prior to the event. It was such a pleasure for Wide Open to be involved with C4C and we felt honored that they chose our magazine over all others for their printed advertisement. Scott Watson made this comment about his experience with Wide Open Magazine, "Wide Open played a huge role in the success of our event. Not only did fans of Wide Open turn out in full force from all over the Midwest, the impact they had by attending the event drew a great response. I can safely say they doubled the size of our rally."

Choppers4Children did more than just entertain fun-loving bikers and raise a hefty sum for charity. In addition, it made a positive impact on the local economy. Of the numerous business owners Watson spoke with following C4C, all reported above average retail sales with several businesses noting record sales for the day. I know for a fact that the Gearhead Grill, a favorite hang out of local bikers, was packed all day.

Mark your calendars for the second annual C4C, which is scheduled for April 29, 2006, to be held again in Neosho. Plans are already underway to make it bigger and better. You can visit the website at [HYPERLINK "http://www.choppers4children.com"](http://www.choppers4children.com) [www.choppers4children.com](http://www.choppers4children.com) New information and updates will be posted there periodically. And be watching for C4C advertisements in the January and April '06 issues of Wide Open.

In a C4C follow up meeting I attended, the question was asked, "What do you think made this event so successful our first go around?" Before I had a chance to reply, County Auditor Charlotte Ward said, pointing to Scott Watson, "This one man, sitting here in front of us." No one in the room argued her response. Anyone who took part in this incredible success story would undoubtedly have to agree with Charlotte's statement.

I'd like to wrap this all up with one of my favorite quotes from President Theodore Roosevelt, which I believe perfectly sums up the work of Scott Watson and those who stepped out in faith to assist him in bringing his dream to fruition.

*"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of good deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions of life and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while attempting greatness; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."*

Scott Watson, I speak for many when I say it was your passion, your vision and your unrelenting devotion that fueled the success of Choppers4Children. Thank you, dear brother. You simply blew us all away.

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