



The MRF

It's **GREAT** When A Plan Comes Together

In the years prior to 1985 several people involved in motorcyclist rights were sharing ideas on how things were going in their different states. They realized of the many organizations out there, some were in their infancy, some were toddlers, others were long-term veterans of 6 or 7 years and still others were great grandfathers having started in the early 70's. One thing they noticed in their discussions was that many times each organization was reinventing the wheel. The organizations all had the same goal but, as independent bikers will be, they had to do it their way. So a small group, primarily from Indiana, decided perhaps it was time to reach out to all these groups and "try" to get them together in one place with the idea of sharing experiences on how to do the basic stuff like; How to put out a newsletter, What is the most efficient bookkeeping system, How to run a meeting using Roberts Rules. The first Meeting Of The Minds was organized in the fall of 1985 in St. Louis, MO. It was quite a sight seeing bikers from around the country gather to share information. I remember hearing a young woman (not a biker) at the banquet Saturday evening comment, "This is amazing all these bikers sitting around, talking, eating, and acting like regular people. You might even think it was a banquet at a political event if it weren't for the black tee shirts and vests."

And that was how it started; we began holding the MOTM every year as a means of sharing information important to the operation of our home state organizations. In 1987 discussions began to turn serious as the Federal Government began to increase efforts of controlling various aspects of motorcycling. The big scare came when Senator John Danforth decided to do something about the rising number of deaths on the newest motorcycling threat, the sport bike, when he introduced the 1987 Super Bike Ban. So in November following the MOTM's a meeting was held in Indianapolis at which discussions were held, decisions were made and the Motorcycle Rights Fund was created (later to be changed to the Motorcycle Riders Foundation). It was also decided that if the organization was to be effective we needed to have someone on the ground in Washington DC. The first attempt was to have an intern in DC for 3-4 months at a time, Rebecca Boyd was our first intern, working out of Howard Segermark's office and while Rebecca did a great job it soon became clear we needed someone to be there all year round, on a full time basis.

The MRF became the first national organization to have a full time representative on Capitol Hill working for motorcyclists. In the search for someone to take up our standard they reached out to Wayne Curtin who at that time was the Legislative Coordinator for Freedom of Road Riders, Inc. in Missouri. Wayne had grown up on the east coast and been involved in politics from an early age, so when he was asked to serve, he packed his kit and moved to the District. For the first six months or so we continued to work out of an office at Segermark and Co. The MRF owes a great deal to Howard for aiding us during the time it took to set our roots in the ground on Capitol Hill. The first office most people will remember was his spare bedroom in an apartment just a stone's throw from the Capitol. It soon became clear this was the right decision as Wayne's presence allowed us first hand knowledge of what would be the next threat to motorcycling. The next threat was not long in coming as we were soon facing Gang legislation, Discrimination, and the ever not so popular National Helmet laws.

The times were hard those first years as the cost of doing business in Washington became a painful reality, but the SMRO's and others would not let the dream die. With help from our SMRO partners, some private individuals, the AMA, and a lot of give and take sacrifice from the Staff in DC we made it through some very hard times. We faced down controversy and corruption with in our ranks and we stared down adversity in the halls of Congress as legislation was brought up to force a national helmet law on states using what we lovingly referred to as "Federal Blackmail". We have met head on threats to our lifestyle, our freedom, and motorcycling, and each time we grew stronger for the fight. We began to understand the axiom that to beat the system you have to be inside/understand the system. We began to reach out to the bureaucrats amid great concern within the movement that felt the MRF was "selling out". But what we found was that in order to know what was going to happen in the future we had to be in the meetings now, where it was being discussed. And we did. Over the years we developed a working relationship with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, NHTSA, the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, an the Federal Highway Administration, FHWA, it doesn't mean we agree with everything, (most of the time we don't) but at least we are at the table making sure motorcyclists voices are being heard. We found that by going to outside conferences such as the Lifesavers and the Governor's Highway Safety Association we were able to become the fly on the wall so to speak and hear what state safety administrators were talking about, and we have even been asked to make presentations to those administrators in an effort to establish lines of communication. From this outreach at the national level we now see Motorcycle Advisory Councils in many states in which SMRO's are sitting at the table providing valuable input, (and slowing down or stopping efforts we might otherwise have to fight in the legislatures.)

As we look at our over all mission in the Motorcycle Riders Foundation there are the parts and pieces that come together to do what we do to protect motorcycling. No one part is more important than the other, as all are integral to the success of our mission.

We have the outreach of the Event and Conferences, the most long standing and popular segment of what we do with our Regional conferences BEAST of the EAST and BEST of The WEST, and the Meeting Of The Minds which will celebrate twenty five years of education and camaraderie this fall, 2009. The MOTM is the premier national conference and the fountainhead for the formation of the MRF.

We also outreach through the State Reps program. We count on our Reps to spread the word of who we are and what we do to members of their State Motorcyclist Rights Organization, SMRO's, and any one else they come into contact with in their travels within the motorcycling community. And through our 'at large' elected Representatives in the form of the SSMRO Reps, the Member Reps, and the State Reps Reps, we try to maintain a two-way communication link to all our supporting entities, members and SMRO's alike.

Our internal structure provides a foundation to see to the day-to-day operation of the organization a function pertinent to every successful organization. As each department addresses the specific concerns of the multi-faceted world of motorcycling we also work in concert with each other as an integrated unit of the whole, the Board, all under the watchful eye of the Corporate officers; the President and Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Membership and the administrative portion of the office, work hand in hand to manage the day to day work flow associated with a membership organization; handling complaints, processing memberships, and seeing to it that the appropriate officers are kept informed as to the heart beat of the organization, our members, all the while attempting to find ways to increase our membership numbers.

The communications department strives to provide our members and the motorcycling public with timely and accurate information concerning the events and actions that directly effect motorcycling. Through our bimonthly newsletter "The MRF Reports" our members are informed of the activities of the organization and issues that are on the rise in importance. Our web site provides access to the same information and the direct link to the organization through email, applications and registrations, but in today's instant access mode that so many feel are the way of the future. Important information is distributed instantaneously through; call to actions, news releases, and update bulletins transmitted via the World Wide Web at MRF.ORG.

The specialty committees reporting to the board are formed as certain needs arise, or become standing committees as an on going need with a specific focus and/or skill set; Rider Education an ongoing committee deals with Rider Training and the specific groups and issues relative to the education/training issue. Alcohol Awareness committee has gone from a temporary committee to an on going committee due to the importance and seriousness of the issue of riding impaired. A committee recently released from service is the MRF Awareness & Education committee. The A&E committee was tasked with the research and education necessary to implement procedures for the formation of a 501 C3 organization for MRF. The MRF A&E is now a reality with its own board and structure, making reports to the MRF Board, but no longer has a committee function on the board.

The legislative team, headed by the Vice President of Government Relations, working out of the Washington DC office, forms the spearhead of the MRF. Through this team the MRF legislative agenda is developed and implemented. By listening to our constituency, and following the trends and issues they can plan and initiate action to head off innocuous legislation and proactively support those initiatives that will be of benefit to motorcycling. The Vice President of Government Relations, VPGR, is the visible 'on the ground' face of the MRF. By attending conferences, and meetings with outside entities and federal agencies the VPGR can interact in a way that gains the inside track to information that might otherwise come to us after the fact, forcing us to be reactive instead of proactive. The personal relationship developed in the home districts of our members with their Congressional Representatives is an invaluable asset to the VPGR as he works on Capitol Hill. But the asset is even more valuable when our membership comes to Washington DC to make the connecting tie between home and voters, and the VPGR. It is this Grassroots Lobbying that has made the MRF legendary in our success and the ability to affect national motorcycling policy.

The MRFPAC is your Political Action Committee that provides support for the Vice President of Government Relations. Through member donations, funds are raised to provide the VPGR the ability to attend activities hosted by candidate support groups or campaign committees. This access is vital to the role of the MRF as this access puts the VPGR in contact with elected officials often in a more relaxed, less formal situation. Time restraints are less stringent and the elected official may be able or willing to spend more time listening to the issues important to our organization. We can also let the elected official know that the concerns we bring to them are also the concerns of their motorcycling constituency back home, once again making the Grassroots connection. The MRFPAC also makes campaign contributions to federal candidates who we believe will support motorcycling.

So what have we done in the twenty-five years since the first Meeting Of The Minds? In 1991 there was an helmet law passed but weakened thanks to work done by the MRF, then four years later we were able to get that bill repealed. There have been other attempts at national helmet laws we have actively defeated. We have been instrumental in augmenting rider

education through support and funding, including the creation of 2010 funds that are to be used strictly for Motorcycle Awareness and Education programs beyond what is being done currently. We have managed to limit certain types of discrimination including health care (a job not quite finished) and the removal of the words motorcyclist and motorcycle in the proposed Gang legislation. We have limited, and in some cases eliminated road bans, (the now infamous downtown Chicago/Lake Shore Drive ban), we got a provision in law that states motorcycles must be allowed access if federal funds are used in any way (study, design, planning, construction, maintenance, we protected access for motorcycles to HOV lanes. We have stopped the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, from lobbying states using our own tax dollars against us in our home statehouses. We were instrumental in the creation of the National Motorcycle Advisory Council to the FHWA. We have met and are in continuing dialogue with Federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Highway Administration, and National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration working in a proactive manor promoting motorcycling as a safe, effective, and efficient means of transportation and recreation. We continually respond to issues brought to our attention as well as seek out areas where improvements can be made such as the 'Right to Repair bill'. The right to repair bill simply limits the proprietary rights of manufacturers once they sell a vehicle, for example allowing the owner and small repair shops access to the ever increasing number OEM computer systems on vehicles. We have worked on sound and safety task forces. We have had numerous articles published in national magazines on issues like the EPA sanctions and standards. We have been and continue to be involved with International issues gaining NGO status, and working in alliance with our European counterparts. Over the years we have developed one of the most effective Grassroots lobbying programs in the country at both the national level and at the state level. Through the programs offered at MOTM and the initiative of motorcyclists everywhere we have seen legislative successes in practically every state. And while it once was all about helmet laws, the topics we work on effect every aspect of motorcycling from education and training, protective equipment, and impaired riding, to sound issues and highway access. When legislators are asked by a new group who to talk to in order to become effective their response is; "Talk to the bikers, they get the job done!"

So this is just a small part of what we have done in the last twenty-five years. What can you do? What will you do? There is a truism in teaching Emergency Response/First Aid; never say "somebody call 911". People will always assume someone else is going to do it and it won't get done. Always point to someone specific and say; "You go call 911!" Now you have delegated responsibility to a specific individual and the task will be accomplished. The MRF needs members. In this time of economic turmoil and tight budgets, donations can no longer be relied upon to fill the gaps keeping the MRF at the status we have grown to, and at some point programs will need to be trimmed or simply cut. The answer is membership. Increasing our numbers and maintaining them will insure the sustainability of the programs and the organization itself. Motorcycling is in jeopardy. There are too many people and agencies that would like to see motorcycling disappear, it solves one of their problems; reduces fatalities on the highways; eliminates an unnecessary part of the motoring public; reduces noise, congestion, unsafe behavior; take your pick there are any number of no good reasons they want us off the road. We know their reasons make little sense but how do we get them to listen? How do we stop them from going off the deep end and regulating us out of existence? The MRF. We are the voice that will be heard because we represent; people, voters, motorcyclists. We are the experts because we ride. Motorcycles are part of our lives, a part we will not let go of, as they say, 'Until they pry my cold dead fingers from the throttle.'

So once again I say; "What are you going to do?" Will you sit idly by and watch your voice be silenced with apathy? Do you know someone that rides but is not a member of the MRF? Will you go out and sign up new members, or will you wait thinking someone else will do it? Help us make sure this plan stays together.



YOU go out and get us new members!