

Some bikers have a soft side

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Heroes on Harleys. Not your typical first impression, but then Top Cats is not your typical motorcycle club.

Founded in 1994, Top Cats Illinois was created to unite two seemingly diverse worlds: business and bikes. More than 100 members, about 65 percent of whom are Barrington-area residents, find it the ideal forum to discuss everything from employee incentives to tax laws, while enjoying the open road.

"The bikers who mean business" also have a soft side, and have adopted the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association as their charity. Their benevolence helps fund NISRA park and recreational programs for children and adults with physical and mental disabilities. Through NISRA's fund-raising, many of these courageous athletes have competed in local and national Special Olympics games.

The Top Cats fourth annual Fall Charity Ride sets off Sunday. Last year, the ride attracted 70 riders, and raised \$17,000 for NISRA. This year, with more cooperative weather, 150 to 200 riders are expected, and the fund-raising goal is \$25,000.

Proceeds come from entry fees, \$25 for riders and \$15 for their passengers, raffle ticket sales, an auction, event sponsorship, and individual donations. The coveted raffle grand prize is a 2001 Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

The ride takes full advantage of the glorious Midwest fall palette. The route starts at O'Trainas Lakeside Eatery in Wauconda, and winds through Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin, stopping at five restaurants and bars along the way. Registration begins at 8 a.m. Sunday at O'Trainas, and the first bike will set out at 9 a.m. The riders return to O'Trainas at 3 p.m. Refreshments will be given at the ride's start, and lunch will be at the end.

All types of bikes are welcome. For details about the ride, call (847) 622-3501 or visit www.topcats.org.

Caption: Shahanian, NISRA director, right, sits with NISRA client on a Harley-Davidson Ultra Glide at a picnic in Langendorf Park. Photo courtesy Top Cats

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