



## Rhode Island Motorcycle Association

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The Rhode Island Motorcycle Association began to sponsor the annual Toy's for Tot's run in 1978.

The association had formed four years earlier as an advocacy group for biker's rights. After achieving the "Freedom to Choose" in the revocation of the mandatory helmet law (the very first in the nation to revoke a helmet law) it was time to look at other ways in which the Association could further promote the advancement of the bikers in Rhode Island and deconstruct the stereotypical image associated with motorcycles and bikers in the community.

Since the Rhode island legislature was in session from January to June each year it was a natural to look at an event that could be held later in the year and allow RIMA the time to coordinate some type of charitable event.

At a board meeting earlier in the spring the idea of a toy run came up after one of the members had read about such runs being held on the west coast. The president of R.I.M.A. at that time was Paul "Dizzy" Santopeitro and he asked the member, Harold Vernon "Sach" Leigh if he had a Santa Claus suit.



Sach as Santa at the 1<sup>st</sup> R.I.M.A. Toy Run 1978

He did, and at that moment, Sach was appointed as the first RIMA Toy Run Coordinator. Sach contacted the U.S. Marine Corps. Reserve unit based in Cranston, R. I. and inquired as to whether the Marines would be interested in supporting R.I.M.A. and benefit their Toys for Tot's program. They were very eager and immediately realized that such an event would increase their ability to donate more toys to needy families through out the region.



U.S. Marines Brian McDermott and Chick Sartini

The first Toy Run, here in Rhode Island, was held in 1978 on the Sunday following Thanksgiving. It was felt that this was the beginning of the holiday season of giving and the Sunday after Thanksgiving would be easy for people to remember. This was the first toy run held anywhere in the eastern United States. At that time it was an interesting news item and a number of local news channels as well as the Providence Journal and Motorcyclist Post ran stories showing large leather clad, beard wearing, long haired bikers carrying toys, dolls and stuffed animals on their motorcycles to

donate. The very first run had only thirty five motorcycles, but the desired effect was realized.



A number of toys were donated by the R.I.M.A. members on that first ride, as well as hundreds more that had been collected earlier at R.I.M.A. collection booths set up at the then named Midland Mall. In the years following, the Toy Run continued to grow in participation and now attracts as many as 2000-3000 riders and passengers, each donating a new toy to the U.S. Marines Corps. Reserve Toys for Tot's program. The run now concludes with a celebration, usually featuring live bands, food, drink, and many vendors. As the ride grew in popularity, and weather became more of a concern, it was determined that the Sunday following Thanksgiving may not offer the best conditions

to ride a motorcycle in, and so it is now held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in October. The ride is now the "kick off" event for the Marine Corps. Annual Toys for Tot's program here in Rhode Island, and is the largest single day event to benefit this worthy cause.



Start of the 2010 R.I.M.A. Toy Run at C.C.R.I. Lincoln, R.I.

In 2011 the run will again begin at the C.C.R.I. campus parking lot in Lincoln, R.I. and conclude in Providence, R.I. at the Russo Trucking facility. R.I.M.A. invites everyone to participate. You do not have to be a member, nor do you have to even own a motorcycle. You only have to have the desire to help children enjoy a gift at Christmas. Hope to see you there!

2011 by: Bud Cardoso & Harold Vernon "Sach" Leigh

