

You may have seen or heard on the news that there was a motorcycle parade in Chicago this past Sunday, 12/7/2014. It was the **37th annual Chicago Toys for Tots Parade**. Vernon Scott has been riding in this parade for a number of years and this year he was kind enough to let me tag along. The only requirements are that **you bring a toy to donate** and that you **ride a motorcycle**. The official number of bikes should be released after the December 20 parade debriefing; but, one estimate I have heard is **over 10,000 bikes**.

I left my house at 5:30pm (20 degrees) to meet Vern at Naperville North High School for a KSU departure of 6:00am. Granted, it was chilly; but, thankfully the roads were dry.

We hopped onto I88 to I355 to I55. I believe we got off at Harlem Ave. Then don't ask me, I just trusted Vern. In about 50 minutes we stopped for coffee at a McDonald's just a few blocks from the gathering point at Dan Ryan Woods. We then took our places easily in the front quarter of the first flight of bikes about 2 hours before the scheduled 9:30am parade kick off. I was very thankful that the CMA folks were serving hot coffee and hot chocolate. The time went by quickly as Vern and I enjoyed walking around and admiring just about every type of bike imaginable. All of the bikers were really friendly. Many were playing Christmas music from their speakers. My bike even sprouted a pair of antlers and a red nose of all things. So many of the bikes were fully decked out for Christmas. You have NO IDEA. I mean REALLY DECKED OUT! Toys were attached all over the bikes. Bikes and trailers were decorated like Christmas parade floats. Bikers were dressed in all sorts of costumes. Santa and his motorcycle elves even joined us to lead the parade. Mrs. Illinois was there posing for pictures. The Marine Corps Reserve, who distributes the toys to needy children, was there with a few Humvee's on display and I spotted at least one civilian "drone" overhead taking pictures. There were lots of bundled up little kids who seemed to enjoy the decorations and the festive atmosphere.

The parade route took us all North on Western Ave. to DeVry University (about 14 miles I hear). Even with the police blocking traffic (yes, they blocked traffic in CHICAGO!) our pace was pretty slow; but, **there were crowds of kids and families all waving and cheering everywhere along the route**. It truly made you forget about the cold (It may have reached 32 degrees at parade time?) And I cannot believe how many parked motorcycles we passed along the way. They must have been waiting to join the parade in later waves. When we reached the parking lot at DeVry, there were people handing out hot chocolate, coffee and cookies. (Fortunately, the lines at the porta-jons moved quickly.) **Governor-Elect Bruce Rauner rode in the parade** and said a few words on stage at DeVry. There were a few vendors on hand; but, most people just dropped off their toys, met up with their friends and rode out to make room in the parking lot for the continuous stream of new arrivals.

A friendly chap handed Vern and I a flier and told us about an after-party at the Harley-Davidson dealer on Joliet road in Countryside. He had me with the words "free beer". So I stopped there on the way home. There was a fair crowd of people. They had live music (jazzy), a raffle, cookies, coffee, hot soup, FREE BEER, and a CHILI CONTEST! They had 9 crock-pots of chili to sample. You voted by putting a dollar into the box in front of your favorite. I had

voted several times, so of course I just HAD to stay until they announced the winner of the chili contest. (My favorite won!) They made close to \$200.00 for their Harley club.

The after-party definitely warmed me up for the rest of the ride home. This is a fantastic event and I would definitely recommend that anyone who can take a little cold weather join Vern and I next year for the 38TH annual Chicago Toys for Tots Parade.

John L.