

Cyclists' Deeds Belie Sheriff's Rap

September 13, 1987

"I WRITE to introduce you to the Lake County chapter of ABATE of Florida Inc. ABATE is a motorcyclists' rights organization. We have chapters throughout Florida.

"We promote good and safe riding habits and responsible legislation to protect motorcyclists. We have a paid lobbyist to present our interests to our legislators.

"This year we have written and helped make law a motorcyclists' education bill. This program will be funded by money from the purchase of motorcycle tags and will be mandatory to people wishing motorcycle endorsements on their Florida driver licenses. The course is similar to one taught by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation.

"We would like to make ABATE of Florida Inc.'s Lake County chapter a viable, responsible organization. If you have any questions, or if we can be of any assistance to you, please contact us."

The above paragraphs are excerpts from a letter sent to Lake County Sheriff Noel E. Griffin on July 25. We also requested at that time that the sheriff let us know whom to contact when we were going to have a "rally" or benefit run. We did not receive a reply to our letter. A sheriff's captain was contacted on Sept. 3 and given the details of our Sept. 13 run. The sheriff's comments in your newspaper on Sept. 4 were, to say the least, a shock.

"They (ABATE) will be monitored," the sheriff said. "The public demands it. The average person in Lake County is afraid of a biker, the way he looks, the way he acts. They break the law, they're going to get nailed just like anyone else."

We would be the first to agree that we look different. The leather and boots that we wear are for protection. The state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles recommends the use of both. The rest of our attire and our appearance is personal preference -- our freedom of choice. Just as we feel that we should have the right to choose whether we wear a helmet or a seat belt, so we exercise the freedom of choice about our appearance.

ABATE members are some of the most responsible, caring people you will find in Lake County. In the past year, besides our own causes, we have participated in toy runs, blood donation drives, Muscular Dystrophy Association drives, organ donor support and many other charitable projects. Please do not judge a book by its cover or allow Griffin's comments to make your decision for you. Meet an ABATE member and then decide.

We do not ask or expect the sheriff to turn his head when the law is broken. However, there is a very thin line between enforcement and harassment.

Kim Lonsdale
Member, Abate of Florida,
Lake County chapter