



Sheriff

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Sheriff Craig Webre
Lafourche Parish, Louisiana
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We Ride for Those Who Died



by Lt. Kathleen Carey, PIO

Day One: 7:00 A.M.

Directly off the Elizabeth River, 400 bicyclists from around the country converged on High Street Landing in Olde Towne Portsmouth, Virginia.

An electric energy hung in the air as the bicyclists readied themselves for their 250 mile trek to Washington, D.C. The 10th Annual Police Unity Tour was moments from starting.

Secretary of Public Safety for the Commonwealth of Virginia, John Marshall, was the keynote speaker at the send-off ceremony. Marshall makes it a point to be at the funerals of every fallen officer in Virginia. In 2006, eleven officers perished protecting their communities. Marshall did not need to refer to any notes. He knew the full name of each person and date that they died. One of those names was that of Deputy Charles Aubrey Fisher of the Portsmouth Sheriff's Office. Fisher lost his life in the line of duty July 8, 2006.

His daughter Nicole Fisher volunteered as support staff for this year's Police Unity Tour knowing it would be emotionally difficult but personally rewarding, "It's gonna be hard. We were close." Nicole said of her father. "I think this will be good for me. Give me some healing."

Stories of valor and sacrifice would be repeated through-

out the three day pilgrimage. Cyclists from 27 states and Canada were driven by the same goal - never forget those who paid the ultimate price. Several Police Unity Tour Chapters met at starting points in Virginia and New Jersey. Ultimately, they would gather at the Pentagon and ride united to the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial on the final leg of the journey.

The Police Unity Tour was founded in 1997 by the Florham Park New Jersey Police Department. The Unity Tour is the single largest private/corporate sponsor of the Memorial Fund. This year, the Unity Tour raised \$1,150,000.00 and has pledged to raise five million dollars to be used toward the construction of a National Law Enforcement Officer's Museum.

Day One: Precisely 8:00 A.M.

The thunderous sound of a dozen motor units lead the parade down High Street. They provided escort and traffic control the entire journey.

The whirr of bicycles and the hoots and hollers of bicyclists directly followed. This was a proud group who pedaled under the motto, "We Ride for Those Who Died."

Each rider wore a bracelet bearing the name of a fallen brother or sister, helping to make this ride very personal for each person pedaling. Deputy William Churchill with the Newport News Sheriff's Office, Newport News, Virginia said, "From the family's point of view, they know their loved one is being recognized. I am grateful for the chance to do my part." Officer Glenda Rivera with the Montclair New Jersey Police Department broke it down this way, "It definitely gives inspiration when you want to stop pedaling up that hill. It's not about you. It's about that person who came before you. That person died doing what we do now."

Various communities paid tribute in their own unique way, often with the fire departments serving as the backdrop for breaks and lunch stops, or the county sheriff personally welcoming the Unity Tour to their part of Virginia.



In Gloucester, the entire Botetourt Elementary School student population lined the town's main drag with hand-made signs and banners. The 500 children screamed with delight at the sight of the approaching riders - high-fiving the police cyclists like they were Olympic athletes.

"It came at the right time," Deputy Joseph Rosalez said grinning. Rosalez is with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office. He continued between gulps of Gatorade, "That was the longest stretch we've gone so far. It really gave us a lift."

Day One: 2:47 P.M.

A hush came over the Urbanna Bridge in the small town of Urbanna. A moment of silence was held to honor Lieutenant Robert T. Hicks.

He was a 36-year old Middlesex County Sheriff's Office deputy when he died May 20, 1984 leaving behind a six year old son. That son is now 29-year old Deputy Robert "Bobby" Hicks with the Newport News Sheriff's Office.

The Urbanna Bridge is where Lt. Hicks died responding to a call of a motorist in distress. "I remember the funeral. Everything about it," reflected Bobby. "I remember there were a hundred uniformed officers from all the nearby jurisdictions. I remember having to sit on the

side because the funeral home was so full. I remember the gravesite."

His father's bravery and selflessness was Bobby's inspiration to follow in his footsteps. "That's what the men in my family do. We're deputies somewhere." In addition to his dad serving the Middlesex County Sheriff's Office, an uncle retired from the York County Sheriff's Office, and a grandfather was a deputy with the Gloucester County Sheriff's Office.

Day Two: 6:30 A.M.

With dew still hanging in the air, the day was underway.

The bicyclists saddled up for another day of riding. They saw fewer miles but encountered a lot more hills. A.P. Hill outside Bowling Green was the monster with a reputation. It had the support staff pulling extra duty. A procession of trucks and trailers accompanied the Unity Tour. They were loaded with drinks and food, medical supplies, and a bike repair shop on wheels. On upslopes like the long, arduous incline of A.P. Hill, they blasted music over their loud speakers and motivated fatigued muscles to conquer the climb.



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Deputy bicyclists with the Newport News Sheriff's Office are seen with their Sheriff at the send-off ceremony in Portsmouth, Virginia. From left to right: Steve Sheridan, Bobby Hicks, Sheriff Gabe Morgan, and William Churchill

The Virginia countryside is loaded with American history. Port Royal, VA turned away John Wilkes Booth ten days after the assassination of President Lincoln - so read an historical plaque posted outside a home. Booth may have been an unwelcome visitor, but Port Royal gave the royal treatment to the Unity Tour.

Day Three. The Final Day: 6:30 A.M.

Cyclists refueled under a pink dawn sky on a breakfast of bananas, orange slices, and bagels.

This was what they had trained for. This is what they came to do. They were 60 miles from the finish line. Every landmark got them a little closer to the memorial. The highlights along day three's route provided the steam necessary to carry on.

There was a stop at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico. A police pipe and drum band played them into Fort Hunt Park for lunch. And then there was the Pentagon.

The Pentagon was the staging area for all the riders coming to D.C. from every direction. A procession of over 1,000 bicyclists stretched over a mile as they pedaled through the streets of the Nation's Capitol.

"Thank you for what you do," hollered a bystander. "Lookin' Good." "God bless you." "You can do it." "Almost there." City block after city block was lined with cheering supporters.

Cheers were exchanged for tears at the sight of the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial. Flowers, photographs, personal affects of all kinds lined the base of the memorial wall.

One rider reached for a single rose worn over her heart. She removed it from her jersey and attached it

next to the name of her fallen comrade. A young son leaned down and touched the name of his father. Thousands of visitors quietly paid their respects. Others hugged and told stories about the brave warrior they were blessed to know.

Engraved in the blue-gray marble walls of the Memorial are the names of 18,000 officers who paid the ultimate price.

And there it was. On the East Wall, Section 60, Line 10: the name Robert T. Hicks. Deputy Bobby Hicks found the name of his father. He gently placed a black and white photograph of his dad near the name.

Bobby couldn't bring himself to speak his emotions, "Those are my thoughts and feelings and no one else's," he said. He chose instead to open his heart with a poem. ✪

A Name in Stone

By Deputy Robert T. Hicks II

*A name in stone is all that is left
Of a man that once stood tall.*

*A man who served, and lived, and
breathed.*

A man who then gave all.

*A man who lived, and loved and cared;
For those whom could not.*

This wall that now bears his name,

Is my father's resting spot.

For now, he stands a different watch.

Now he guards the gate.

To be the light for all to see,

When life was not their fate.

He now stands proud and now stands true,

Whenever he hears the call.

That one more of the Thin Blue Line,

Did serve and then did fall.

To my father:

Lt. Robert T. Hicks

Final Roll Call - May 20, 1984