



In the year 2009, The Cookson Hills Toy Run was an awesome success, making our 16th year the best ever. The toy run is held in memory of our service men and women "Those Who Gave All" and to those who continue to fight for our freedom and the freedom of others.

Thanks to nearly 1500 folks who participated in bringing gifts to near 450 children. Without you, those children would not have had Merry Christmas memories. Every year YOU make miracles happen for children in our area. We continue to donate gifts as we find the families in need until the 23rd of December at which time items left over go to a few area churches that provide Christmas to the homeless. As of December 23rd, over 550 children received Christmas presents. Thanks to your generosity, over 3100 children have received Merry Christmas memories in our 16 year legacy!

A few stories came from this year's event. We'd like to share them with all of you:

David, our interpreter, from WQBN, was walking through the children shortly after the unwrapping ceremony. He saw a young teenager holding a soccer ball and crying. Asking the boy's mother if there was something wrong, the mother explained the tears. Evidently the father had abandoned the mother and (4) children a few month prior to the event. The young man had written a letter to Santa and been praying to Jesus to please give his siblings something for Christmas, that he didn't really need anything but if they saw fit, he would like a soccer ball. Due to God's guidance, his prayers were answered more that he expected. Each of his siblings received several gifts, as did the boy. No one at the event knew of this child's desire. Out of near 450 children a young boy received a soccer ball, his only request, something he didn't expect when he was praying for his brothers and sisters.

Two volunteers sent us an e-mail telling us of their experience as they were leaving at the end of the event and passed a family walking, carrying their gifts. They turned around and asked if the family needed a ride. It turns out the family had walked 10 miles that morning from their home to Evans Park so the children would be there to receive gifts. If not for the toy run they would not have anything for Christmas.

When a young child unwrapped one of his gifts, he discovered it was a wallet. Inside that wallet was a \$1 bill. He thought he was the richest kid in the world.

Robert, a Special Needs Individual, is ecstatic that the bikers have adopted him. Those of you who have given him the "special" gifts have no idea how positively you have affected his life. He tells everyone he meets all the attention he has received from the bikers. You are his family. He asks over and over how he is so lucky and his smiles never end. Thank you ever so much for all your generosity toward this young man.

A mother brought her 10 & 14 year old daughters to the event. They didn't receive but a few gifts so one of the volunteers asked Bill for a couple gift certificates. When she gave the certificates to the girls the 10-year old handed hers to her mother and said "here Mom, this is so you will have a Christmas too". The volunteer said the mother told her the certificate would go to buy food, another scenario where the father had abandoned the family.

After the presents were passed out and toward the end of the event, two young mothers, with 5 week old and 6 month old babies, arrived at the event. We had talked earlier and it was too cold to bring the babies. When they arrived, they apologized for not being there on time and stated their probably wasn't anything left. I told them we had already talked and their gifts had been set aside. When they received the gifts, they both broke into tears. They so appreciated the diapers and baby clothes but what brought on the tears was the \$60 in Wal-Mart gift certificates. Seems the children had run out of formula and there was no money.

One of our long-time participants fell into hard times. For those of you who were there, she shared her story with all. For the first time she was in a situation where she was in need and couldn't provide Christmas for her children. After years of bringing gifts to children at the event, her children were there to receive. She said she'd be back next year in good health and bringing cheerful smiles to the kids once again. We want her to know how glad we are that the toy run was there for her in her time of need. Our prayers are with her.

The Shriner's motorcycle patrol once again wanted to bring the miniature funnel cake cooker to the event. We couldn't find a generator to run the equipment. On Thursday it was suggested we contact Tampa Armature. After speaking with the dispatcher, who has been attending the event for several years and explaining our situation he said he'd get back to us. Turns out on Friday, they sent a driver to Orlando to pick up a generator, he then gave up his ride with the other bikes to bring the generator out to the event, connected the equipment, volunteered for other needs and on Monday, the generator was returned to Orlando. The amazing part of this story is that Tampa Armature didn't charge the toy run any money and said they'd take care of us next year. The Shriner's Motorcycle Patrol apologizes for not having enough funnel cake mix with them and said next year they will have plenty for everyone!

Our friends at Buccaneer Sheet Metal who cooked and provided the ribs, cooked the hamburgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers and baked beans said they will be back next year. Richard said his wife has already decided how to make the food area work more smoothly. He said his family is excited about returning for another year. Longhorn Steak House-Hamburgers, First Choice BBQ-Coleslaw, Darlene-Macaroni Salad, and Hungry Harry's BBQ-Pulled Chicken helped in providing all the great food. We so greatly appreciate your generosity. There were enough ribs, coleslaw, macaroni salad and baked beans left over to feed about 150 people which were donated to a small church in Clair Mel to feed the homeless. They were ecstatic!

Linda, the lady who packed 138 packages on her bike last year, almost didn't make the event. She has been out-doing herself for many years. On Sunday morning the bike wouldn't start, loaded with gifts, the battery was dead. She tried charging it but to no avail. She called someone who called someone who knew someone with an auto parts store who opened the store, had one battery to fit her bike, had to charge the battery, took it to Linda's house, helped unload the bike, installed the new battery and helped re-loaded the gifts. Thanks to all the folks who helped her, she made the event with 168 presents loaded everywhere one could be strapped, bringing many smiles to kids.

A couple awesome ladies brought out boxes of new clothes and distributed them to the families attending the event. The families want to let them know how much they appreciate the clothes. Thank you ever so much for your thoughtfulness!

To all those who volunteered both at Veteran's Memorial Park and Evans Park, we are in your debt. To the Veteran's Motorcycle Club and Ruff Ryders we wish to "Thank You" for your coordinated effort in bringing everyone from Veteran's Memorial Park to Evans Park safely. Without your help the event wouldn't have been such a success. Veteran's Memorial Park and Evans Park, we want to Thank You ever so much for allowing us access to the parks. They are the perfect locations for everything. We have heard many compliments on how well everything went this year.

It's amazing every year how so many special people coming together in this community make this event such a success. For the first time, the event came within a few hundred dollars of paying for itself. Even so, we donated \$1100.00, \$100 each to Brandon ECHO, Brandon Outreach Clinic and to 10 schools represented at the event of the 14 who provided families this year and had a representative at the event. One school returned their gift. All have let us know how much they appreciated the donation.

The auction, raffles, T-shirt sales, Food and Drinks along with private donations totaled \$11,257.00. With the purchase of gifts for children and special need individuals, food and drinks, picnic supplies, advertising, legal fees and liability insurance, park rental and other necessary expenses including \$1100.00 donated to the charities and schools who had representatives attending the event expenses totaled \$12,299.00.

The Cookson Hills Toy Run received some recognition for all you folks have accomplished. In January 2008, the event was nominated for Bay News 9 Everyday Heroes award, received Seffner Chamber of Commerce 2008 Charity of the Year and Hillsborough County Veteran's Association's "Keeping the American Spirit Alive" Award. We were interviewed on ABC Action News in December of 2008 and again on November 25, 2008 which was broadcast on December 2nd then included on their web site; on CBS Channel 10 a live interview was broadcast on December 4 and included on their web site; Fox News Channel 13 was taping live at the December 6th event and broadcast on their December 7th morning news and also included on their web site and on December 19th, a radio interview was broadcast on the Women's Show at WMNF. The Osprey Observer had a great write-up in their neighborhood newspaper. Seffner Chamber of Commerce nominated the toy run for both the Sharon Carter Community Service Award and Outstanding Non-Profit for 2009. We've also been told that the toy run is the best kept secret in the Brandon area.

Family Ministries decided in 2008 that they did not want Cookson Hills Toy Run holding the event on their property and no longer needed our help. We succeeded in our goal to bring the community's awareness to Family Ministries and are happy to have been a part of helping them for 15 years. We wish them well. The children's home is no longer called Cookson Hills. The name was changed several years ago to C. H. Family Ministries of Florida, Inc. The original Cookson Hills Christian Ministries Children's Home is located in Kansas, OK and Family Ministries is not permitted to use the Cookson Hills name. Cookson Hills Toy Run, Inc. is not affiliated with Family Ministries of Florida in Seffner and has never been connected to the Kansas, OK location.

Several folks have suggested we change the name of the toy run. We would appreciate everyone's thoughts on this and would like some suggestions for a new name. We have received our designation as a 501c3 Federal Tax Deductible Not for Profit and your donations are tax deductible. Bill & I get the event organized but we need your help to continue providing children in the community with Christmas Memories. Your donations to help pay expenses, purchase gifts and food for the event are greatly appreciated. This is your event. You make it happen. We can't do it without you. Please send your comments to cookson toyrun@aol.com.

Thanks to all of you who sponsored the event, volunteered, brought out plenty of gifts for the children, attended the auction, joined in the raffles and purchased the great food. Ron Gallops thank you for bringing the Jet Bike – we understand the kids really loved it. The folks in this community and those who traveled to make this happen for the kids are the greatest in the world. You are due so many THANK YOU'S.

Check out our web site: www.cookson toyrun.com. If you have any questions, want to volunteer or sponsor the event, please send an e-mail or call 813-643-5758. We are a 501c3 Federal Tax Deductible Not-for-Profit Charity. For those needing a letter for deducting your donation on your taxes, please send your name and address.

May 2010 bring you wealth, happiness and peace. God knows you and your families all deserve the best of wishes for the generosity you have shared with others from your heart. We look forward to seeing all of you and meeting new patrons next year on the first Sunday, December 5, 2010.

Thank you all so very much for joining our quest!

Bill & Sheri Brown