



## The Post-Standard

### Riding with a Knight

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When Dan Vineall, of Munnsville, purchased his first motorcycle five years ago, he went in search of a group to ride with. It took a while, but in 2005 the volunteer firefighter finally found one.

"I saw one of my fellow firefighters at a motorcycle shop and he asked if I wanted to join the Red Knights," said Vineall, 43. "I had heard of them briefly but never really followed up."

The "Red Knights" his friend referred to is, in fact, the Red Knights Motorcycle Club, an international organization with 225 chapters and approximately 6,000 members world-wide. Founded in 1982 in Boylston, Mass., the organization claims chapters in the U.S., as well as Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and Austria.

Vineall joined Red Knights New York Chapter 19, which was sanctioned in February 2004 and spans Madison, Oneida and Herkimer counties. The chapter began with a roster of seven members, and over the course of the first year grew to more than 30.

"I enjoy it," said Vineall, who now serves as chapter president. "There's a lot of camaraderie there. Several of the guys I ride with I knew for several years through schooling or mutual aid or what have you."

The purpose of the group is to bring together fire service personnel and their families via a shared interest in motorcycles.

"Some of the time we sit around and (talk) about what goes on in our stations but it mainly is a social thing," said charter member Ken Ernenwein, of Verona.

Membership is open to all firefighters - active, retired, paid, volunteer or industrial - who hold a valid motorcycle driver's license. Spouses, children, and partners of members are also welcome to join as social members.

Aside from monthly business meetings, members also gather for group rides and other activities.

"We try to keep it family-oriented," said Vineall's wife, Kelly, a social member. "We try to do family picnics every year. This past year we did a Christmas party. It's a nice group."

But one of the Red Knight's biggest missions is raising money for charity.

On Aug. 18, the chapter will sponsor its fourth annual Ride for the ARC. Sunday, it hosts its first Loop for Lupus poker run and barbecue. In both instances, individual members were either connected to or directly impacted by the cause.

"Basically, part of being organized, you have to have a goal in mind for fundraising," Vineall said. "They decided to raise money for the ARC and, at the time, two of our members were employed by ARC. This will be the first year for Lupus. One of our social members has Lupus, and it was actually brought to our attention by her that the group was looking to have a bike ride. We pursued it from there."

Both rides are "poker runs" where participants register, are given a map to follow, a card for stamps, and are sent on their way. Drivers stop at selected locations along a 70-plus mile route and acquire stamps for their cards. In the end they compete for prizes and enjoy a cookout courtesy of the Red Knights.

Aside from such community-service events, the Red Knights also have programs in place to help their fellow firefighters. Through its "Heroes Among Us" project, for example, the group raises and gives money to fire personnel in need.

"We sponsored a ride in 2005 on Sept. 11, and last year we did it in the early part of June, for fellow firefighters that were injured or needed a leg up to get themselves out of trouble," Vineall said. "We didn't end up doing the ride this year. We're in a bit of a reorganization to try to figure out the way we want the ride to go."

Even though they didn't ride, the group took money left in the fund from prior years and donated it to the family of Oneida firefighter Mitch Dryer, who was critically injured in April.

"When he got hurt we thought it'd be a nice gesture to make a donation," Vineall said.

It is this willingness to go above and beyond that has led the group to accept its first award. On June 1, Madison-Cortland ARC named the Red Knights New York Chapter 19 its Volunteer of the Year.

"They're a great group of people that have wrapped their arms around our cause," said Christine Sears, Madison-Cortland ARC director of development and public relations. "They just have this can-do attitude that's wonderful."

According to Sears, nominations for the award are sought each year from the agency's 450 employees and are then considered by a special committee.

"The Red Knights just flew to the top," she said. "Their whole mission is to help others. They're putting their lives on the line every time the fire whistle goes off and they're choosing to help Madison-Cortland ARC. I can't say enough good about them."

Motorcycling firefighters with a penchant for fundraising, be aware: The Red Knights are looking for new members.

"The bigger the family the better it is," said Ernenwein, a 20-year volunteer with the New London Fire Department.

To find out how to join Red Knights Chapter 19 or to learn more about the group, visit their Web site at [www.redknights19.org](http://www.redknights19.org).

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