

Today we remember the largest and most terrifying loss of life by an attack on our country in history. Not by an armed force but by an ideology that hates us for who we are. Even as we, and nations like us, welcome them to our country. The days of a country's uniformed armed force fighting another country's armed force is over. Unless North Korea draws us into another of that kind of war.

Today is also Patriot's Day. A day to remember the good of our country. I would like yearly to spotlight patriots we have here in Monroe County.

This year I wish to start with Monroe County's own ABATE Region 18. ABATE is an acronym for American Bikers Aiming Toward Education. It is a national organization and Region 18 are the men and women who are our friends, family, and neighbors.

The mission of ABATE (in a nutshell) is to educate both motorcycle riders and the public in safely sharing the nation's roads and highways. They are also very politically involved.

Our ABATE Region 18 follows the national view and does so much more. If you attended this year's county fair you may have noticed the ABATE booth not only had the highest and largest American flag flying, they also had flags representing the five armed forces including the U.S. Coast Guard. They also flew flags supporting the fire fighters, the police, those still held as Prisoners of War and Missing in Action, and those wounded service members, police, and fire fighters. No one came close to this show of patriotism.

Each Memorial Day they assemble at Monroe and Fourth Streets to cheer and support every veteran that passes in parade. They also make a "ride" travelling together to our county monuments and parks and cemeteries to pay respect to our fallen veterans. How many of us do all that?

ABATE Region 18 has supported living veterans through various donations and assemblies. They tried to help the VFW post at Newport survive and when that post closed they went to the VFW post in Maybee, cleaned up the grounds, repaired facilities, and did their best until even that post closed this year.

They are active in the "Adopt A Highway" program and always make the twice a year cleaning of their assigned route on Telegraph Road. Never needing to be reminded. How many of us do that?

Every May they post signs and billboards to "Look Twice – Save A Life" to remind us all that distractions and inattention not only can cause an accident with a motorcycle, it's just dangerous to everyone.

They teach and strongly endorse that before anyone buys or rides a motorcycle they take a course in motorcycle riding and safety. On this subject they have stronger beliefs than the police. They would like to see this mandatory to all who ride motorcycles. For me as a boater I wish this would be mandatory for boat ownership also. Just because you can afford a motorcycle (or boat) doesn't mean you should be operating without training and experience.

ABATE Region 18 is also very involved with our state senators and representatives on bills that affect ALL of us, not just traffic laws. People like Senator Dale Zorn and Rep. Joe Bellino and Bill LaVoy before that always make a point of coming to their monthly meetings and discussing legislation. Member Adam Thorn is very adamant that what happens in Lansing is everyone's responsibility to know and have input.

Now some people will remember ABATE's push to repeal the mandatory helmet law. ABATE was NEVER against wearing helmets when riding motorcycles. ABATE has always been for motorcycle safety. If you notice; you'll hardly see an ABATE member riding a motorcycle wearing tennis shoes or "flip flops". You'll never see them riding wearing shorts. They wear long pants, leather, and gloves. That is because in most small to large accidents those parts of the body are the first to be affected either from hitting the pavement or metal.

The reason for fighting the helmet law was because like wearing seat belts, it was a totalitarian law that uses the guise of safety of the individual by a group who want to force their opinions upon another. And/or monetary gain and enforcement by police.

That group uses statistics in their favor using accident records but ignoring the fact most injuries are to different parts of the body. And that is what ABATE is concerned about.

Thanks to ABATE Michigan is a "choice" state. In fact ABATE has pushed for and enforced that underaged riders do wear helmets. And they conceded that anyone who does not wear a helmet pay an additional insurance fee. Which, in turn, makes a rider more cautious.

Yes ABATE Region 18 is a patriotic organization. A large number of the members are veterans so part of that patriotism comes from that. One of Region 18's member is the most patriotic person I know and he never served a day in the military. I would advise against saying or doing anything against this country or state to him. He is my younger brother Tony Diaz!