



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Weekly Column: 20 years later, Ride for Missing Children still raising awareness

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 3, 2016

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A missing child is every parent's worst nightmare. For parents who commit themselves to doing whatever it takes to protect their children, the thought of something happening to one's son or daughter is almost too much to bear.

It is this fear, and the universal hope of keeping our children safe, that unite hundreds of people every year in The Ride For Missing Children across Central New York. Together atop

their bicycles, these men, women and children proudly cruise for 100 miles in a sea of pink, blue and white uniforms to honor the memory of all missing children.

On June 3, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of The Ride For Missing Children. For the past two decades, more and more riders have volunteered to raise awareness of the plight of children who have disappeared, while spreading a message of abduction prevention and hope. As The Ride's motto states, their goal is to "make our children safer ... one child at a time."

What would become the biggest annual fundraiser for The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children New York/Mohawk Valley all started years ago with a little girl named Sara Anne Wood. In 1993, Sara disappeared while walking her bike home and the Mohawk Valley community rallied together around her family with hope for her safe return.

Sara has never been found, but her disappearance prompted her father, Bob, and six other men to team up in 1995 and raise national awareness of missing and exploited children by riding their bicycles from Litchfield, N.Y., to the Capitol steps in Washington, D.C. It was called "Sara's Ride" then, but their voyage soon blossomed into the annual Ride For Missing Children as more and more people joined this mission of protecting our children.

Today, more than 500 riders participate in The Ride as it stops from school to school along the route, bringing a message of safety and hope to all those who witness this inspiring event. There are now five Rides For Missing Children events all across New York State, with the raised funds used to help distribute missing children posters and to provide community education for the prevention of child abduction and sexual exploitation.

This is more than a bike ride, though. It is an emotionally draining event, with each rider wearing a pin that represents the child they are riding for. As the bikes travel a winding

route throughout the region, this open path symbolizes that the group's passionate work is never done. In other words, we should never give up hope and never stop searching for a single missing child.

Missing and exploited children have had to suffer a kind of fear and trauma that no child should ever have to endure. So as The Ride is a time to remember all the children who ever experienced this plight, it is also an opportunity to comfort each other and celebrate those who have survived.

Congratulations to all of those who have made The Ride For Missing Children such a success on behalf of our children.

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