

Best Community Activity Award - St. Therese Council 8285, Jackson, MS

Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Safety Fair

Mississippi leads the nation in both the number of people who are killed each year from Traumatic Brain Injuries and the rate of incidence per 100,000 population. In the year 2001, over 980 citizens died and 11090 citizens were injured from a traumatic brain injury. The largest group who died and were injured were young men under the age of 28. Traumatic brain injury is the leading cause of death for people under the age of 30 in the United States. More than 5,300,000 people are currently living with the catastrophic results of traumatic brain injury. It is know as the "Silent Epidemic." The annual cost to taxpayers for the care of an individual who has survived a traumatic brain injury is more than \$200,000 per year which includes health care, lost wages, rehabilitation care home health care and medications.

In March 2001, the Grand Knight of Council 8285 presented this information to the grand knights of three other councils in the local area. He made a request for volunteers from his council and the three other councils to assist him in a project called the "First Annual Safety Fair." The purpose of the Fair was to get the word out about safety for our most vulnerable citizens, our youth and our senior citizens. These two groups constitute the largest number of individuals who are at risk for a traumatic brain injury. The goals of the project were to provide a means where safety information was provided to parents and children about safety in the home, community and at school. More than 30 different non-profit organizations exhibited safety programs throughout the day. Additionally, every child, adolescent and young adult who visited the exhibition booths was fitted with a free sports helmet. Senior citizens received information on how to make their homes safe from injuries caused by falls.

More than 125 Knights and members of their families volunteered to provide manpower for the safety fair. One council agreed to cook all the hamburgers which were provided to the more than 3,750 people that attended the fair. Another council sent volunteers to wrap and distribute the food for the picnic as well as serve the beverages. Brother knights showed up at the fair grounds at 7:00 a.m. to set up the many booths, tents, tables, chairs and recreational equipment that was used throughout the day. Brother knights and family members received instruction on how to fit the children with the right size helmet and participated in the distribution of the safety information provided by the exhibitors. Knights and their families provided volunteer services throughout the day and assisted in cleaning up the fair grounds, taking down tents and booths and packing up the remaining materials to be used at the next safety fair.

These gentlemen and their families spent more than 12 hours that day and served more than 3,000 parents and grandparents, fitted and distributed 750 sports helmets for children, cooked and served more than 7,000 hamburgers, served more than 50 gallons of iced tea, 40 gallons of lemonade and distributed 30 cases of bottled water. Over 300 bags of popcorn, 400 cones of cotton candy and 25 cases of candy were served to participants in the safety fair. The day was so successful that the Safety Fair will become an annual event with funds for the project donated by several attorneys and local companies in Mississippi. The City was so impressed with the project that the 2nd Saturday in May is now declared the Brain Injury Association of Mississippi Safety Fair Day.

Without the support of brother knights and their families from four area councils, this event could not have been the success that it was. As a testament to the success of the Safety Fair, in the months after the Fair was conducted, there was a significant decrease in both the number of people killed and the rate of incidence of traumatic brain injuries for the local area that was served by the Fair.