

Morganza's 50th Anniversary Easy Rider Festival

A sense of nostalgia and sentiment filled the village of Morganza, on Saturday September, 28th as The Honorable Clarence "Woots" Wells flagged motorcyclists and automobile drivers into their assigned parking spaces. Among them, Johnny Doucet and friends, a group of more than 70, riding for the *Rockin on the River Benefit*. This was the first stop for the group on their long journey to raise money for muscular dystrophy.

Mayor Wells has worked tirelessly, cleaning the old school house to prepare for the occasion. A task that not many political dignitaries have on their records. Only, this very humble man who loves his community and desires its future growth.

This event attracted people from far and near. Amidst the highlights of the day, was a ***Car and Motorcycle Show and Shine***. Among this display were: cars dating between the 1940s to the 1960s. Also, the motorcycles on display were: vintage models from the 1950s; newly custom built bikes; and brand names such as: Harley-Davidson, BMW, and Indian.

Many notabilities and celebrities were also present for the gathering. They enjoyed food and relaxation in the ***Mayor's Lounge***. Comprising this diverse list were esteemed professionals, such as: political dignitaries; actors from the film; custom motorcycle designers; musicians; and businessmen.

There are seven people living from the ***Melancon's Café*** scene in the film. The sequence was filmed in Morganza, Louisiana in 1968. Arnold Hess Jr., who played the deputy and all six actresses from the scene are among them.

Present at the event were Mr. Hess and four of the ladies: Elida Hebert Aronstein; Susie Ramagos Vosburg, Cynthia Grezaffi Dupree, and Rose Leblanc O'Rear.

Other celebrities in attendance were Ronnie Eades (musician) and Jacye Guerin (singer) who both took the time to entertain the crowd.

The Melancon Café Custom Bike Competition was another activity of the day. This was conducted in respect of the movie bikes also, being custom built. All three place trophies were designed by Johnny Doucet of ***Bad Az Bikez***, who built them from old bike parts and had beautiful Melancon's Café graphics added. Contest judges were bikers: Jim Leonard, a visitor from Texas; and Danny Tastet from Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

First place, titled "Melancon's Triumph Award", went to Trish Monier of Ville Platte, Louisiana. This was a surprise for Johnny Doucet, when returning from his ride, who had also, previously designed the candy red trike for Trish.

The celebration also, included, ***The Born to Be Wild King and Queen Contest***. Participants entered the contest weeks in advance. The winners names were then, selected from a drawing days before the event. Crowned during the festival, were King Rene' Thibodeaux II and Queen Michelle Bennett, both of Morganza, Louisiana.

To the amazement of everyone, was ***The Jim Leonard Easy Rider Collection***. Mr. Leonard, who is from Liberty Hill, Texas, shared his memorabilia with fans.

The display included: The ***Hero Bike***, which was the motorcycle ridden by Peter Fonda in the film. This bike was made of mostly original parts, with very little replication needed.

Also, there was the ***Billy Bike***, which included three original parts, and was otherwise, perfectly duplicated.

The exhibit was topped off with Wyatt and Billy look-alikes, as well. The life-size figures, were, sculpted, then molded, before being finished with silicone. This was the artwork of Mr. Leonard, himself. The final touches, of painting and hair, were completed by friends of his.

Everyone, enjoyed the bands: ***La Rouge***, and ***Kenny Cornett & C.J.*** We heard a variety of songs, including "Born to Be Wild".

The crowd purchased gifts from vendors, such as, jewelry, essence oil, and t-shirts. The food vendors included everything from snow cones to sandwiches.

In addition, Louisiana Seafood donated, shrimp and fish for all. This was done in collaboration with Jeanie Andre, Executive Director of the ***Pointe Coupee Parish Office of Tourism***. Accordingly, and to the delight of partakers, there was a bountiful supply.

Under the direction of the ***Morganza Cultural District Board***, the festival planning committee, organized and worked to entertain a crowd of over 4,000 attendees. It was through the efforts of Jeanie Andre, ***Pointe Coupee Parish Office of Tourism***, that visitors from across the United States and several countries abroad were notified about the event. Mrs. Andre has also, secured the film ***Easy Rider*** and therefore, the location of Morganza as part of the ***Louisiana Film Trail***.

Easy Rider foreign fans present were from: England, Spain, Germany, Denmark, and New Zealand. Those from the United States spanned from the New England states to the Hawaiian Islands.

Indeed, on this happy day, memories were made and much joy had, celebrating the movie that has marked history, and touched the lives of the people of Morganza, Louisiana.

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Film Pointe BOD and Easy Rider Festival Committee