

Special Olympians beneficiaries of Warriors' efforts

By CINDY MOOTY
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They do it every year.

Businessmen, construction workers, police officers — 47 men from all walks of life — travel approximately 900 miles across the state by snowmobile to raise money for charity. And every year they have donated more money.

The first Wertz Warriors Snowmobile Endurance Ride in 1982 raised \$35,000 for the Michigan Special Olympics Winter Games. This year they were able to present the organization with \$235,000. Total donations to the charity now total \$750,000.

"The donations are at least double what they were last year. I don't know where towns of 40-50 people get \$3,000-4,000 for this. It keeps growing and getting better and better," said Ken Baker, chairman of the ride.

The Warriors raise money from the towns they pass through along the route, fundraisers in each of the riders' home towns and from \$2,000 entry fees each of the riders must pay.

Being able to underwrite the costs of the winter games in which approximately 700 mentally impaired children and adults participate in events such as skiing, skating and snowshoing was the goal of Warriors' late founder, former Detroit Tiger and Clinton Township beer distributor Vic Wertz.

"Seeing those kids is what it's all about," said Baker, one of only seven men who have made the ride every year. "We were all pretty tired and whipped but it was a good ride."

Special Olympics State Director John Walsh said the Warriors are one of their biggest fundraisers. What makes the group so unique is that the Warriors are not a corporation or business.

"This is a group of individuals who said they were going to do this. You just don't see that any place around the world because most of your donations come from corporate sponsors or organizations," he said.

"Without them, we would be struggling," he added. "With the amount of money they raised last year (\$200,000), we were able to give back the \$40 (each athlete had to pay) for registration fees. That was historic and we should be able to do it again this year. Being able to pay all the expenses and give back the area's registration fees is very exciting."

This year's Mount Clemens-Mackinaw ride was Feb. 7 to 14. Plans are already in the works for the 1988 ride.

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LISA Krul, a 19-year-old New Baltimore resident, proudly displays the medal she earned in the cross-country event.