

# DIXIE ABATE SEPTEMBER 2012 NEWSLETTER

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SEPTEMBER 13, 2012

## THE GREAT DEBATE: SAFETY OR FREEDOM?

*This article will illustrate the reason all Dixie ABATE members need to be engaged. Come to meetings, talk to us on the forum, talk to us on Facebook, hit us up via email or call us. But let us know how you would vote on the basic bedrock principles involved in this issue.*

As you all know by now, Alabama has a dismal track record in preventing motorcycle fatalities. So far this year we have lost over 70 riders. 11% of those wrecks were caused by rider error—there was no other vehicle involved.

We can't get any grant money from federal sources until we show that our efforts have brought the fatality rate down. If Dixie ABATE's trajectory takes it in the direction of an attempt to get Alabama's helmet law loosened or repealed, we need solid footing with legislators. We need to know them all and they need to know us. They need to know how hard we work to eliminate fatalities and they need to see, year in and year out, how consistent and responsible we are.

Only a good working relationship with legislators coupled with a significant membership roster will get us where we want to go, no matter what it is that we're trying to change.

The Unified Coalition on Motorcycle Safety has drafted a bill that would require a new rider to pass a safety class or a short riding test before he gets his "M" endorsement. Dixie ABATE has a seat on the Coalition and endorses the bill. It hasn't been revised into its final form yet, but it is being shaped right now and the plan is to have it pre-filed for the 2013 legislative session.

Alabama is the only state in the union that doesn't require any kind of riding evaluation before you are licensed to ride a motorcycle, at any age. In fact, most people over age 38 in the state automatically got their motorcycle endorsement when they got their drivers license.

Believe it or not, riders' opinions are split on this issue. We have heard from many riders who think this is just knuckling under to more oppressive legislation. We have also heard from many riders who think it will save lives.

Dixie ABATE will keep you informed of the Coalition's progress, and will have the full text of the bill available on our website forum when the final draft comes out.

What do you think? Weigh in. You know how to get in touch with us.



**Should a 14 year old ride a motorcycle on the road?**

**Should a 16 year old have to take a riding test to get his license?**

## WHAT DO WE WANT?

When most states' ABATEs began, ABATE stood for "A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments." Riders were sick of being treated as trash by their legislators and they were sick of being misunderstood by the general population, which was partly a result of the biker movies of the 60's and the reputation the Hell's Angels had.

We have to decide who Dixie ABATE of Alabama is and what we want to do with our time and our money. Our goal, agreed upon by the members

who participate, is to eliminate motorcycle fatalities in this state. We plan to do it through education initiatives. Our videographer is working on the Driver's Ed module to be used in Alabama's high schools. We have a billboard up and plan to raise funds to put up more. We travel the state listening to the stories of riders who have wrecked, and we try to make sense of the information and open our minds to seek new ways to keep those situations from repeating themselves. Everyone knows a rider who wrecked.



Above: Dixie ABATE member Jon Bean

We DO want to preserve our right to "ride free," but we need to define what that is. Participate. Come to our next meeting. Run for office. It's a pivotal time in this state and you can make a difference.

## DIXIE ABATE'S PRIORITIES NOW:

- *Staying informed of the Coalition's work on the licensing bill*
- *Work on securing federal and private grants to fund our awareness campaigns.*
- *Become acquainted with our legislators*
- *Officer elections and 2013 membership renewals*
- *Get a motorcycle awareness module into drivers ed classes.*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

THE GREAT DEBATE 1

WHAT DO WE WANT? 1

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT 2

LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT 2

COMING UP 2

ANNOUNCEMENTS 2

## Treasurer's Report at a glance:

**State account:**  
**\$4,844.44**

**Mobile account:**  
**\$274.03**

**We owe Lamar \$2,000 as soon as the new bill-board goes up.**

Contact Information:  
Kris Cook, Secretary  
Dixie ABATE of Alabama  
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Birmingham, AL 35233  
205-617-9944  
kcook@dixieabate.org  
**Single membership is \$20.00 per year; \$30.00 for a couple.**

## WATCH YOUR EMAIL/MAIL FOR OFFICER NOMINATION FORMS



Tentative: October 20, 2012  
State Meeting at 2 PM in the  
HOG room at Heart of Dixie H-D  
in Pelham, AL. Check our forum  
and the calendar on the website  
for the latest news.

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: GREGG "GEE JAY" JONES

Gee Jay lives in Mississippi, so I thought I'd give him a call and see why he joined our organization. Turns out he rides with the American Legion Post 88 out of Mobile, which isn't far from his Hurley residence. He belongs to our Mobile Chapter.

He said he'd been riding all his life, and was a member of Georgia ABATE for years. His father was a Shriner, so he rode with the Shriners from the beginning. He started riding a Custom Softtail to school when he was 13. He will turn 50 years old next March.

I asked him his crash story, since everyone has one. He told me about Easter Sunday, 1985, when a motorist

ran him off the road in the fog and he hit a culvert. He still has screws in his left ankle. He bears the driver of the other vehicle no ill will, since the fog made him nearly invisible.

He was on our Ride to the Capitol in Montgomery. "I was sitting on the steps when you all rolled up," he told me.

I asked him what his pet project would be. He said, "think of the most important word there is. Don't speak for one full minute. Think about it, then tell me what it is." Well, I couldn't sit still for a whole minute on the phone, and I guessed "love." "That's a good word too, but the most important word is

THINK. That is what people don't do enough of."

Gee Jay believes in freedom from nanny state hassles, including seat belt laws and anti-smoking laws. When I asked him what he thought about a licensing requirement, he said, "I think it's a great thing. I think it needs to happen."

He discussed how little has been done in Alabama concerning motorcycle safety, but when I asked him what he would do to fix things, he responded, "It's like asking me to fix the national deficit!"

And that was a really good point. Thank you for a great interview, Gee Jay! —Kris Cook

## LARRY LINDSEY'S TRAVELS

**Legislative Visit 5**  
Northeast Alabama  
Tuesday, September 4, 2012 11:30 AM  
**Senator Paul Bussman (R) 4th District (Cullman, Lawrence, Winston)**  
1625 Main Ave., SW  
Cullman, AL 35055  
256.734.1700  
Senator Bussman met me at his dental practice office. We spoke for about 30 minutes and in that time covered all the points I had prepared. He said that he does not ride but, that his brother does. He said, "I will help you any way I can. I think this (skills evaluation) can make a difference." Subsequent feedback through Johnny Turner, ABATE member was positive. Johnny said that Senator Bussman wasn't sure if we could get all we want. I think he may have been referring to the complete participation of state examiners.  
Tuesday, September 4, 2012 1:00 PM  
**Representative Ken Johnson (R) 7th District (Lawrence and Winston)**  
26050 AL Hwy 24  
Trinity, AL 35673  
cell: 256.947.5175  
hm: 256.947.5468  
This meeting took place at the business office of the representative. He is a motorcycle rider and sponsored the Dead Red bill in the 2011 session. Rep Johnson is very enthusiastic about having a required skills evaluation and currently endorsed riders being grandfathered. He offered a valuable suggestion on a possible way to help diffuse concerns that a new rider may have prior to attempting a skills evaluation:  
"Why not place on the state website a video demonstration of a rider going through the skills evaluation? This could be there where you sign up to take it, pay for it and get all the information about it. It should be where you go to get information for the vessel and the hunting evaluations. It should also link to rider course opportunities as well which

would be encouraged."  
This meeting lasted for nearly two full hours with lots of brainstorming.  
Wednesday, September 5, 2012 11:00 AM  
**Representative Terri Collins (R) 8th District (Morgan)**  
**Representative Micky Hammond (R) 4th District (Limestone and Morgan)**  
**House Majority Leader and Chairman Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee**  
Morgan County Legislative Delegation Office  
The Greens Office Park  
2124 6th Ave., SE  
Decatur, AL 35601-6510  
I delivered my prepared presentation to both members who listened attentively. Then they began to ask questions and to offer suggestions. Representative Collins asked, "Would we permanently grandfather all current licensed riders or renew them with the skills evaluation once when they're license came up for renewal? My answer was that they would be grandfathered and then renewed with no skills evaluation required. To clarify, she stated, "So, all new riders of any age would get their M endorsement by passing a skills and knowledge evaluation." I said yes, that is my understanding. She said that this is something that we need to do.  
Representative Hammond agreed that we need the skills evaluation. He said that, in the bill, we should be specific and have it backed up with statistics. I stated that in a meeting with Captain Guy Rush, Alabama Chief Examiner with DPS, I learned that the funding for additional examination duties is a critical issue. Representative Hammond agreed and was interested to hear about what the Unified Coalition would suggest. I briefly described the idea of third party examiners operating on the campuses of our junior colleges. And, that they would be paid from the funds collected from those seeking the skills evaluation.  
Friday, September 7, 2012 10:00 AM  
**Representative Greg Burdine (D) 1st District (Lauderdale)**  
1905 Bruin Dr.

Florence, AL 35630  
256.767.4900  
greg@smbllawyers.net  
Representative Burdine is an attorney. We met in the conference room at his office. The meeting lasted for 30 minutes and started on time. He did not question the need for some changes in the current law regarding motorcycle licensure. The ability for fourteen year olds to obtain a license needs to be addressed and possibly some restrictions on sixteen year old riders as well were included in his comments. He said that we should ask for more than we want so as to provide a place of compromise that would result in getting the skills evaluation in. He asked to be able to see the proposed bill when ready.

The other legislators in Northeast Alabama were not available during my time in the area. Several invited me to reschedule. I plan to return to the area before the next session for more meetings. Overall, we have support for our approach in addressing our state's motorcycle fatality rate. After the lawmakers learn of ABATE's efforts in the areas of new driver education and public education regarding sharing the road, they tend to open the door for further information sharing. I believe that by asking for their help in solving the problem, rather than demanding they just "take care of it," we are well received. They have not questioned that education is the best way to reduce fatalities. Many, if not all, are aware of rider behaviors that add to the problem. I think they do believe in the educational approach along with a required skills evaluation. None have suggested that these things would not make a difference. If we could get a concisely written bill on the table and continue to promote it as we have, we stand a good chance of being successful in achieving the goal of saving life and limb of the ever increasing numbers of Alabama motorcycle riders.

Larry Lindsey

## COMING UP

At our next meeting, we will have a drawing for a \$50.00 VISA card. Every attendee will get a ticket, and someone will draw a number at the end of the meeting. If your number comes up, it's yours. The weather should be fantastic that day, so come on out. Just check first to be sure of the location. As of the date of this newsletter, we don't have a firm commitment from Heart of Dixie.

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Elections are coming up. Positions that will open up this fall are: State Director, Secretary, Activities Director, and membership/recruitment officer. If you want to nominate someone, or if you want to volunteer to be considered for one of these positions, respond when you get the email that will be going out shortly. If you don't have email, get in touch with any officer to volunteer or nominate.

We will take nominations at the October meeting, and the election will be held around the time of the November 17

meeting, which will be in Montevallo, probably at Eclipse Coffee and Books.

We will install our new officers at the December 15 meeting, which will be a joint meeting with the Southern Region Mobile Chapter, in Mobile, probably at the Oyster house on the causeway.

If 2013 sees our membership double again, I will be one proud momma. If all of you recruit just ONE PERSON, that will happen. That is so easy! Let's do it!

— Kris