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Photo by Steve Saenz

Mal Wessell, far left, shares a laugh with Members of the American Cruiser MC, left to right, Tony Castelli, Charlie Gallegos, Johnny Espionza and John Manser during the 28th annual Toys of Tots Telethon at the Elks Club. American Cruiser MC donated 15 bicycles. December 2, 2007 - 9:51PM

28th annual Toys for Tots Telethon raises over \$6,000

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By [DAVID HELDRETH](#) Staff Writer

BARSTOW — It's not often that bikers, soldiers, entertainers and city leaders can be found in the same building. Let alone in the same room.

However, that's exactly what happened at the Barstow Elks Lodge on Saturday during the 28th annual Toys for Tots Telethon, which raised \$6,600 for the charity.

“This is what our organization is all about,” said Elks Exalted Ruler Marion Ketring. “It’s about helping less fortunate children. It a great event. Everyone is part of it. It’s a community affair. They either donate, do the auction, bring food. Everyone does something. That’s what makes Barstow great. It’s the best place to live.”

The telethon moved around in the past, but it has been held at the Elks lodge for 10 years. Throughout the day, the band The Boogie Men and singer Bobby Futle entertained the crowd between auctions and events.

“It’s just about as good as we’ve ever done,” said telethon organizer and 28-year participant Mal Wessel. “It’s just one of those really good days. There were a lot of nice kids running around. Parents were there with little kids. There was a Santa. It just went well.”

Local bikers were represented by two groups, the American Cruisers Motorcycle Club and the Rough Riders Motorcycle Club. Both clubs hold poker runs during the year to raise money for the charity in addition to the money and toys that the members of the clubs donate. The American Cruisers donated 15 bikes to the charity, while the Rough Riders added \$1,300.

Three branches of the armed forces were present as well. Two members of the Navy volunteered for the telethon. Army soldiers from Fort Irwin answered phones and did whatever was needed.

Several members of the Marine Corps helped set up for the event Friday evening and were back Saturday. Both services have had their fire departments collecting toys each Tuesday since November 13 and have been collecting toys throughout the rest of the year as well.

Toys for Tots is run by the Marine Corps Reserve.

“I think the soldiers come out to help because they see and know there’s people in the community that are in need,” Army Staff Sgt. James Allen said. “There’s such a large Army contingent nearby, and so many civilians at Fort Irwin, and this supports not only the bases, but Barstow, Daggett and the surrounding areas.”

Unfortunately, some of the toys collected won’t make it to any children. Allen and Marine Corps Sgt. Zipporah Foley said they have had to discard toys that were part of recent recalls because of lead.

“People should check everything they bring in for paint or little parts that kids could put in their mouth,” Wessel said.

You can visit the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Web site at www.cpsc.gov to check for toy recalls.