

The 10th Annual Emily's Parade



Photos by Carrie McCauley, David Campbell

This year marked the 10th annual Emily's parade which fell this year on September 27th. The official totals for the parade this year were 1484 motorcycles with 593 passengers and 275 volunteers. Police departments representing Jefferson County, Aurora, Golden, Parker, Wheatridge, Arvada and Denver were on hand to keep the motorcyclist safe during the trek up the mountain from Columbine High School to Platte Canyon High School.

The first Emily's parade was arranged 10 years ago. Frank DeAngelis said that he had heard Peter Boyles talking about the possibility a parade that could be taking place on the radio and he got in contact with John-Michael and himself, and the first Emily's parade was held on October 7th, 2006, a short ten days after the tragedy at Platte Canyon High School. This year's parade also coincided with Colorado's First Responder's Appreciation day. Tim Gregg, a neighbor of John-Michael and Ellen, and the father of one of the hostages in the classroom with Emily, worked to create the Colorado First Responders Appreciation Day. September 27th has been adopted as First Responder's Appreciation Day in Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

The tradition of the balloon release was also started 10 years ago in memory of all the people who have lost their lives in the face of school tragedy and violence. Before the balloons were released retired Columbine high school principal Frank DeAngelis said: "As those balloons go up, think about what we can do to make the world a better place, because that is why we are all here." This year's balloon release was slightly more emotional than the previous years because this year's event was held nine years to the day that Emily tragically lost her life.

"The foundation was started in the face of tragedy, but we can choose our response when confronted with tragedy. We lost Emily in 2006 and in 2009 we began a program working with schools. The standard response protocol." Although the parade had been taking place for three years, the foundation did not retain the funds from the parade until 2009. When they decided to create the foundation John-Michael said "We didn't



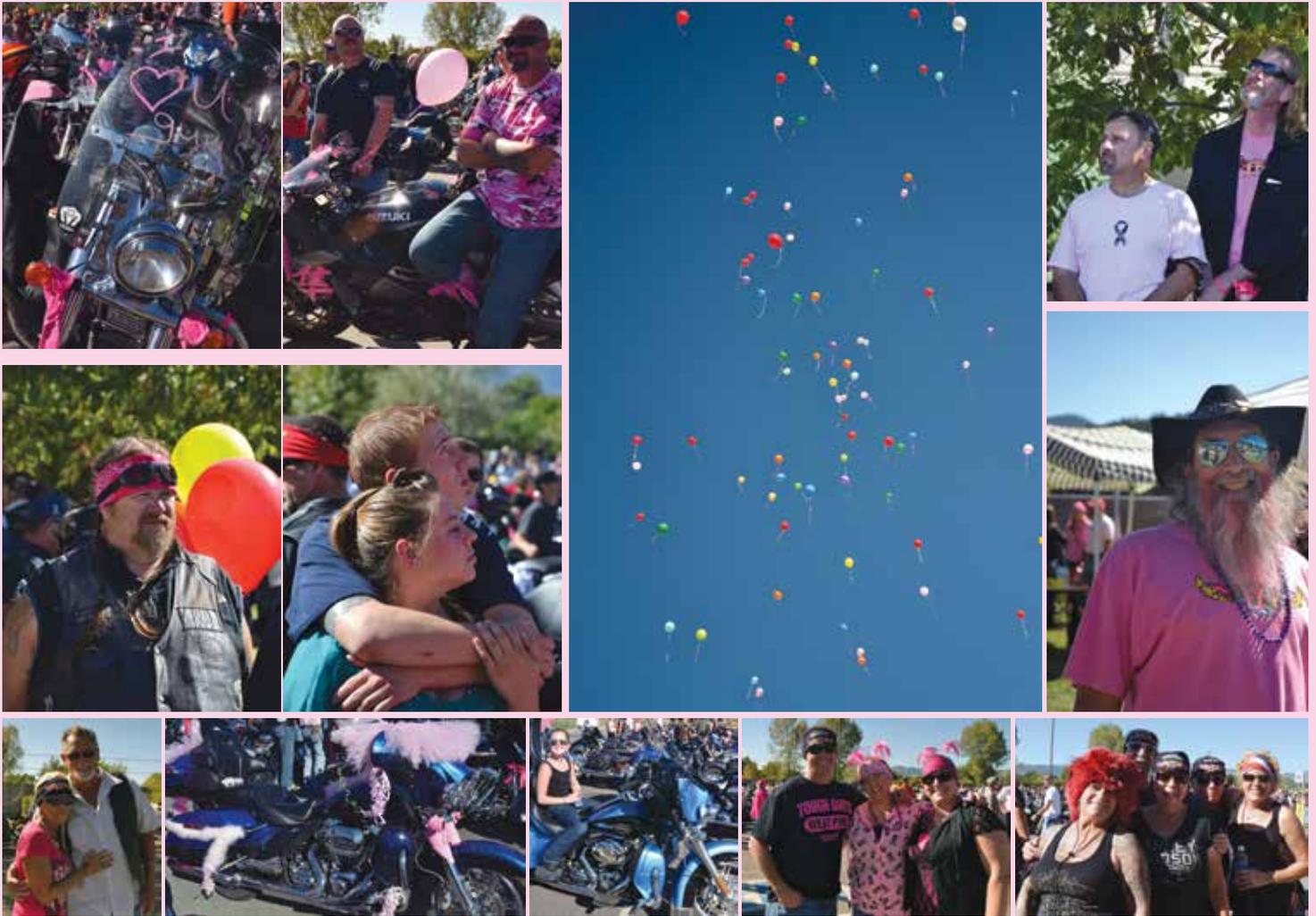
realize how big the vacuum was when we started to it. As we started to roll this out we were thankful of the structure."

"We started humbly, tentatively. The very first school district was Jefferson County. When I presented to Jefferson County they talked about piloting. They called me a week later and said 'we aren't going to pilot this program in Jefferson County, we're going to implement it'" John-Michael told TRCO "That was pivotal"

The Emily's parade sells challenge coins each year, but there is a black nickel version that is struck and is not available for purchase and is given by John-Michael. This year the black nickel version was presented to Karen Jones and Eileen Doolan who have been behind the scenes of the parade each year. John-Michael is frequently presented with challenge coins, his first was from Jefferson county sheriff Ted Mink. It is an honor to be given a challenge coin and John-Michael has received many throughout the years of working with the foundation.

Along with the people waving and cheering, the motorcyclists were treated to a fantastic view of the fall colors on the ride up US285 this year. Once they arrived at Platte Valley High School they were welcomed by the volunteers cooking and giving out hamburgers, hotdogs and sloppy joes. This year the flight for life landed in the same place it did nine years prior with the nurse Peter Werlin who took care of Emily after the shooting. The motorcyclists were encouraged to go and visit Peter and the flight for life crew. So many people work tirelessly on that day and far in advance of the event. The foundation has volunteers that worked on the first event and still participate in the Emily's Parade each year. "We try to honor the riders." Is what John-Michael said to Thunder Roads Colorado when we asked him about the parade.

The foundation helps schools and organizations all over the country teaching about the Standard Response Protocol.



There are many examples, but the SRP helps thousands upon thousands of lives. John-Michael went to Oklahoma and assisted in conducting an exercise with over 900 people including students, staff, and first responders. While they were waiting to start and there were a couple of girls that pointed at the Standard Response Protocol posters and said, You know that there are some things that adults don't want to talk about; until that poster went up; now we talk about it. John-Michael said; "Kids need to know you have a plan", Ellen echoed that thought by stating "Talking about it scares the parents, not the kids." The artwork for the posters, cards, handouts, and the presentation is the same that is given to both students and staff. The standard response protocol is constantly improving because John-Michael is "Out there, absorbing and reformulating". The Standard Response



Protocol addresses a "tough subject that is non-threatening to schools, staff, students and parents".

"Emily gave us a voice, with that voice she told us what to say, I Love U Guys"
John-Michael Keyes

