

6-28-1999

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Recommended Citation

Manforte, Tracy, "UNH Police Honored for Skill, Bravery During '98 Bike Week" (1999). *UNH Today*. 3089.
<https://scholars.unh.edu/news/3089>

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UNH Police Honored for Skill, Bravery During '98 Bike Week

By *Tracy Manforte*
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- University of New Hampshire police officers returned from Laconia recently with a cruiser full of awards honoring members of the department for their exceptional performance during a riot with the Hells Angels last summer.

For the past several years, UNH officers have assisted local and national law enforcement officers with the annual motorcycle week that traditionally draws upwards of 400,000 people to a congested mile-long strip around Weirs Beach. This year's event was held June 13 - 20, with UNH police again offering support.

Last year's event, however, resulted in injuries to police and bystanders after a riot broke out among the Hells Angels and officers. Nine arrests were made and all individuals are serving time in state or county prisons.

Officer Jason Smith, who was among the nine UNH officers to receive awards, was singled out for bravery by the city of Laconia, the U.S. Department of Justice and Congress.

"Your efforts in coming to the aid of a fellow officer and a civilian who were hurt in an altercation with the Hells Angels were an example of putting your personal safety aside to protect the lives of others," wrote First District Congressman John E. Sununu (R-NH) in a letter to Smith. "This shows a deep caring for the community in which you work and those citizens you have sworn to protect." Smith will travel to Concord in July to receive the Congressional honor.

Smith, a former U.S. Marine who has served the UNH department for two years, recalled last year's harrowing experience. "It was the most violent incident I have ever encountered as a police officer," he said. "The lack of regard for safety and life was unbelievable."

Chief Roger Beaudoin added that "there are thousands of others who go to the motorcycle event who are good people. This small minority had very little respect for themselves or others."

Beaudoin also presented awards to other UNH officers who were instrumental in handling the Laconia

incident: Sgt. Clancy McMahon, Sgt. Thomas Swett, and officers Brian Shaw and Cecil Cooper. Awards were also given to former members of the UNH squad: Paul Dean, James Young, Michael South and Thomas Cote.

June 28, 1999

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