

RCUF presents \$2,000 contribution for preservation of Rush Co. covered bridges



photo provided
 Pictured left to right, back row: David Willkie, Jerry Sitton, Kenny Aulbach, Mark Bacon, Chuck Kemker, Ron Jarman. Front Row: Jennifer Krodel and Tianne Ripberger.

Cassie Garrett
 REGIONAL DIRECTOR

At the Rush County Commissioners meeting on Monday, Jan. 29, the Rush County United Fund (RCUF) updated commissioners on the 2023 Willkie Days "Five

in 50" Covered Bridge Bicycle Ride.

A portion of the proceeds from the 2023 ride was presented to the commissioners by RCUF representatives David Willkie, Tianne Ripberger, and Jennifer Krodel to preserve the five Rush County cov-

ered bridges. The \$2,000 donation increased from last year's \$1,500 contribution.

Over the years, Rush County has been home to at least 23 covered bridges. Unfortunately, only five of them remain today. One of the remaining covered bridges is

the Moscow Covered Bridge. It was built in 1886 by Emmett L. Kennedy of the Kennedy family firm, who was responsible for many of Indiana's covered bridges. The bridge is of Burr Arch construction and stretches over the (See "RIDE" pg. 5)

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Big Flat Rock River, with a length of 334 feet (102 m) in two spans. It is the third-longest covered bridge in the state. Sadly, on June 3, 2008, a tornado destroyed the bridge and dropped its remnants into the valley of the Big Flatrock River, causing a devastating loss to the community. However, local and state officials soon decided to rebuild the bridge. State prison inmates were used to retrieve salvageable material from the old bridge

from the river bed for reuse. The Dan McCollum and Sons firm was hired to manage the reconstruction of the bridge, which was dedicated and reopened in September 2010.

RCUF spokesperson and Five in 50 founder David Willkie said that the fifth annual 2023 ride had almost 500 riders from 15 states, an increase of 25% over the 2022 ride. There were zero accidents, and the ride went off without a hitch.

Willkie said, "Our over 60 volunteers put on an excellent event that showcases the beauty of Rush County while raising money for important local charities." RCUF agencies benefiting from the Five in 50 include Changing Footprints, MORE For Kids, Rush County Victim Association's Phoenix House, Rush County Community Assistance, Rush County Senior Citizens Services, Inc., and the Salvation Army.

Willkie continued, "Thank you to the Rush County Commissioners, Highway Department, Sheriff, and Emergency Management for helping highlight some of the best of Rush County. The people working for county government are great partners and great people."

Each year, the Five in 50 riders vote on the best of seven Supply and Gear Stops. This year's winner was Offutt Covered Bridge,

sponsored by the Salvation Army and Kiwanis Club of Rush County with a western chuck wagon theme. Riders were provided homemade cornbread, baked beans and honey sticks. Each rider was given a bandana.

Other stops offered local watermelon, peanut protein balls, James Dean/poodle skirt/rockabilly theme, freshly baked cookies, and runner-up "Barbie theme," which included a life-sized Barbie box that was a photo booth for the riders.

The bicycle riders

start off the Willkie Days parade and travel through the towns of Milroy, Moscow, Gowdy, Homer and Arlington while traveling all five Rush County covered bridges in 50 miles.

Commission Mark Bacon thanked RCUF and Willkie for projecting a good image of Rush County. Bacon motioned that the 2024 Five in 50 be approved as an official event for the county, which was approved unanimously. The ride will be on Saturday, Sept. 21, 2024. Registration is now open at WillkieDays.com.

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