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Motorcycle Riders Foundation's Kirk 'Hardtail' Willard Recipient of Coveted Sturgis Freedom Fighter Award

WASHINGTON, DC – The Sturgis Motorcycle Museum Hall of Fame recently issued an announcement confirming the incoming class of the 2018 Hall of Fame-ers. Each year, the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum & Hall of Fame recognizes individuals or groups who have made a long-term, positive impact on the motorcycle community. This year's class is noteworthy and diverse featuring artisans and craftsmen, philanthropic organizations and several women; all who have made an impact in the world of motorcycling. However, this year, a special award category, designated as The Freedom Fighter Award, was identified. The recipient for 2018 is the Chairman of the Board of Directors and President of the Motorcycle Riders Foundation, Kirk "Hardtail" Willard.

Hardtail, as he is known in the motorcycle rights world, is spoken upon with the highest regard from riders representing all walks of life. From the aftermarket industry and original equipment manufacturers to the motorcycle clubs and state motorcycle rights' organizations, he is known as a force to be reckoned with. Logging thousands upon thousands of miles on his motorcycles, his objectives have always stayed pure; to promote and preserve motorcycle riders' freedoms and lifestyle. He has done just this not only locally in his home state of Wisconsin, but nationally and internationally through his work with the Motorcycle Riders Foundation.

A Lengthy List of Accomplishments

His name is synonymous with the Motorcycle Riders Foundation; an organization of motorcycle rights activists directly responsible for the historic repeal of the federal government funding incentive for states to require a helmet to ride a motorcycle. Though Hardtail himself worked to steer the MRF and its supporters in their efforts to ban National Highway Traffic Safety Administration employees to lobby state governments to implement universal protective gear laws. He worked tirelessly throughout the years, refuting EPA's "Color and Chrome" initiative which would only allow riders to make cosmetic changes to their bikes, but would affect their performance through emission control devices. Prior to his taking over as Chairman of the MRF Board of Directors, he helped voice support to establish (and eventually expand) the only national lobby and advocacy day for bikers in the nation's Capital.

Known as "Bikers Inside the Beltway" Hardtail helped to augment this yearly gathering into a highly anticipated powerhouse of an event, attracting hundreds of bikers from across the country to Washington, D.C. to meet with their elected officials. In recent years, the event has expanded, bringing rider education and training tools directly to the Capitol for lawmakers and staff to experience as well as plans to collaborate with the House Motorcycle Caucus this year in an event to recognize May as Motorcycle Awareness Month.

In more recent years, Hardtail's leadership and work on the federal highway transportation bill lead to provisions which ended all federal funding of motorcycle only checkpoints which had been used as a way to target those who ride under the guise of "compliance checks." He was also one of the catalysts in resurrecting the Motorcyclist Advisory Council – a group of riders with a direct connection to the nation's top highway safety professionals to advise them on issues of importance to motorcyclists. And under his direction in 2017, bipartisan and bicameral legislation was introduced, recognizing and condemning instances of motorcyclist profiling and encouraging states to take action.

Accolades Across Aisles

Those who know him often compare his leadership style to that of President Theodore Roosevelt's mantra – to walk softly and carry a big stick. His tireless and relentless commitment to the motorcycle community has made an impression on his friends and colleagues including Dave Dwyer, who is a former Board Member of the Motorcycle Riders Foundation and active member of ABATE of Wisconsin; "I have traveled the country with Hardtail and I feel that there is nobody in the United States more deserving of inclusion in Sturgis Motorcycle Museum Freedom Fighters Hall of Fame than Kirk "Hardtail" Willard."

And in Willard's home state, the Executive Director of ABATE of Wisconsin Dave Charlebois said, "Not only has Hardtail given a significant amount of time and effort to the motorcycle rights movement at the local, state, and national levels, he has inspired and mentored leaders for decades and has selflessly ensured we remain strong and vigilant. I can think of no one more deserving of inclusion to the Sturgis Freedom Fighters Hall of Fame."

Even those not directly involved in the motorcycle rights world were aware of his affect on the motorcycle community. Former Member of Congress Reid Ribble, who represented the 8th district of Wisconsin from 2011-2016 said, "No one could be surprised by the news that "Hardtail" has been selected for the Sturgis Freedom Fighter Award. He regularly visited me while I served in Congress and was among the most effective advocates for the motorcycling community that I ever worked with. He is a true champion of riders everywhere and this recognition is well deserved!"

Mr. Willard will be officially inducted into the Hall of Fame at the 78th Sturgis Rally set for August 3-12, 2018. A breakfast and ceremony in honor of the inductees will take place at 9am on Wednesday, August 9. Tickets are available online at <https://www.sturgismuseum.com/Hall-of-Fame-Banquet-Tickets> or interested parties can be invited to sit at a table purchased by the Motorcycle Riders Foundation and ABATE of Wisconsin in honor of Willard's induction.