

## Rebels with a cause

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

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### TRENDING

#### Honoring Bill Lunney

Bill Lunney is retiring after more than 50 years of environmental and government advocacy. His legacy will last for generations.

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#### A rotten year

A lot people in Madison are wondering what the hell is happening in our schools. Even Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham has called it a “trying year.” Isthmus talked to nearly 30 teachers to find out what’s happening behind the scenes.

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#### Millennial magnet



VICTORIA DAVIS

**From left, Ryan “Kingpin” Mack, Jason “Rooster” Coop, and Emily “Switch” Meiser cruising with the Leathernecks motorcycle club.**

Jet black Harley-Davidson motorcycles glisten in the hot summer sunlight outside of Waunakee’s Missouri Tavern. This is the meet-up place for Madison’s Marine Corps biker group, the Leathernecks. They’re getting ready to ride to Point Burger Bar for Bike Night, where motorcyclists from all around Madison gather on Wednesday nights.



Many come for the university of well-paid jobs in the health or tech sectors. Whatever their motivation, young adults are moving to Madison by the tens of thousands.

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## Edgewood offered to “coordinate messaging” on lawsuit with mayor

In the days before Edgewood High School filed suit against the city of Madison for religious discrimination, one of the school’s lawyers offered to coordinate with the city how the lawsuit would be explained to the public.

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## Nails’ Tales bails

Opinions on “Nails’ Tales” ran from loathing to indifference. But with no political controversy behind the work, the statue didn’t engender a public fight.

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“There’s a weird stigma in the motorcycle club world,” says Chad McVay, or “Madman,” president of the Leathernecks in Wisconsin. “A lot of people think that motorcycle clubs go bar to bar and get hammered and cause trouble. We’re not like that at all. We’re straight-laced. We have families and honest jobs. We’re just building that camaraderie of Marines and doing what we love, which is to ride.”

With branches in 38 states, the Leathernecks are a national biker club created by Marine veterans. Its members often wear leather vests with the Marines Corps’ insignia — an eagle, globe and anchor colored in red and gold — stitched on the back. While the national club is almost 20 years old, the Madison branch was started in 2013. McVay was a founding member.

“It’s like being in the Marines without any of the B.S.,” McVay explains.

Along for tonight’s ride are Ryan Mack (“Kingpin”), Jason Coop (“Rooster”), Chris Heaton (“Leon”), Chad Adler (“Sidetrack”), and “honorary girlfriend members” Emily Meiser (“Switch”) and Sarah Erickson (“Clover”). Each member’s road name is chosen for them by the other club members. When a name is selected, it’s sewn onto the front of their vests.

“Chad chose my name,” says Erickson of her boyfriend, Adler, hopping onto the back of his bike. “He tells me it’s because I’m Irish, and because I’m his lucky charm.”

The group “saddles up” onto their motorcycles and the air is filled with the thundering roars of Harley engines. The sun shining on their backs lights up their Marine emblems. Mack — or “Kingpin” — leads the other road wranglers with Coop and Meiser on his right. Rap music booms through their speakers.

“I needed the adrenaline rush,” says Mack, about why he joined the Leathernecks in 2017. “That was a big thing I was missing when I got out of the military.”

Mack met The Leathernecks during a bike night at Quaker Steak, which is now Point Burger Bar. After leaving the Marines in 2012 and moving to the Madison area, Mack felt isolated

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because he didn't know anyone and was grappling with alcoholism. But that night, Mack saw the Leathernecks vests and felt a connection.

"I didn't feel like anyone could relate to me, but these guys all could," Mack says. "Strict court programs couldn't fix me. But these guys, they hold me accountable. They know my past and they'd slap a drink right out of my hand. My leathernecks patch means so much to me."

McVay adds that veterans often have a hard time finding gathering places. Veterans of Foreign Wars posts have become so open to the public, he says, that "veterans don't feel comfortable going there and that sucks. We wanted to create a zone where these guys could feel safe and drop their guard."

The Leathernecks are a registered nonprofit, dedicated to helping veterans and veteran organizations. Every year, the national branch donates \$25,000 to the Semper Fi Fund to help wounded veterans and last February the three chapters of Wisconsin Leathernecks donated \$5,000 to the Wisconsin Veterans zMuseum. On Christmas Eve, the group cooks food for homeless veterans at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Chippewa Falls.

"I think the vests throw people off," says Mack, who earned his name "Kingpin" from his part mob-boss, part football player-like appearance. "But we look more intimidating than we actually are."

When the squad pulls into Point Burger Bar's parking lot, it is packed with motorcycles. Male and female bikers are munching on burgers with their families on the patio. Mack, now three years sober, grabs a table with his own "family" of six.

"These guys literally know everything about my life, so yeah, they're my family," Mack says. "They come to my daughter's birthdays and I know that if anything were to happen to me, my daughter would be taken care of. They'd watch out for her."

He adds, "When you're wearing this badge and these colors, you're representing the Leathernecks. There's no B.S. allowed."

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### The Leathernecks names:

“**Switch**”: Comes from her “switch” in personalities from nice to “psycho” when someone messes with her boyfriend Coop.

“**Leon**”: After *SNL*’s Leon Phelps character, also known as “The Ladies Man.”

“**Rooster**”: Because he grew up on a farm and his last name is spelled the same as chicken coop.

“**Sidetrack**”: Because he’s often getting sidetracked during conversations.

### 35th annual Wisconsin Summer Twister:

The Leathernecks fundraiser held July 25-27 in Birnamwood. The event includes live music, food, drinks, biker games, contests and a memorial service honoring veterans. Tickets are \$50-\$70.

SNAPSHOT



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### COMMENTS

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CHRIS LOTTEN

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OCT 18, 2018

JUDITH DAVIDOFF

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JUL 25, 2019

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