



Thursday, May 26, 2005

## He drives kids to achieve



Ward Ring shows off the Robert F. Kennedy award he received for his commitment to youth development. In addition to teaching adults how to repair motors, he conducts classes for teenagers who aren't thriving in traditional school settings.

Ward Ring wasn't on the college track in high school, instead he loved taking things apart. He lived for the thrill of learning how equipment worked and landed a job at a bicycle repair shop, where tinkering was part of his job description. After mastering bicycles, he moved on to motorcycles and discovered a passion for teaching while working at a repair outfit in Hartford, Conn., in 1977. There, he helped men and women learn skills they could use to make a living.

But he also worked with at-risk youth through the National Youth Project Using Minibikes (NYPUM). The program rewards youngsters for meeting specific goals by allowing them to repair and ride minibikes. Mr. Ring related to the young participants, and wanted to give them a chance to succeed. Although he later moved to Touisset and opened the Motoring Technical Training Institute in East Providence with his wife, Sharon, Mr. Ring maintained ties to the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corp., which runs NYPUM. Recently,

the organization presented him with the Robert F. Kennedy award for his commitment to youth development.

Motivated to be a mechanic: "When I was in high school, I saw no reason to go to a four-year college. I just had the desire to take things apart and figure out how they worked."

Tapping hidden talents: "It's important to remember all the youth of the world, not just the honor students. Some kids are skilled plumbers or welders, but a traditional educator doesn't recognize their talents."

Teaching teens: "Two days a week, I run a youth exploratory program for troubled kids. Most of these students come from single parent homes. I try to remember the kid who's going to get lost in the shuffle. The kid another teacher throws out of class could be my best student."

Motorcycles motivate kids: "I raced motorcycles for years and I always found that younger kids were really interested in what I was doing. I got involved in NYPUM in 1977 to give some of them direction. Through the project, troubled youth can fix and ride minibikes if they live up to the terms of a contract. It motivates a lot of them."

Did you have a motorcycle when you were a teenager? "My father forbid me to have one. But now I have 30 or 40."

Which is your favorite? "I mainly ride a BMW on the street."

On the road: "After I taught in Hartford, I worked for Suzuki for five years. I was a test rider and taught mechanics classes across the country. I lived in hotels for three years when I worked that job."

Do you still enjoy riding? "I love the independence of it. It's my time to meditate."

How do you relax? "I play hockey a couple times a week. I'm a golfer. I scuba dive. And I also fish."

Where do you fish? "Some of my friends own an island in the middle of a lake in Maine. There are cabins and outhouses, but no cell phones. We go trout fishing. Our wives are invited, but they usually don't go."

Working in Warren: "I'm also the truck steward for Touisset (fire company). I restored Vintage Engine 6 with a couple of guys in the company."

Favorite flick: "'Jeremiah Johnson.' I just enjoy seeing a guy who's that independent."

A musical mechanic: "I played bass guitar in a band for years. Now I play the banjo. I play the ukulele when I don't want to make as much noise."

Any pets? "Two cats — Joe and Scummy. My daughter named him [Scummy]. The vets tell us we've won the naming contest."

On being a mechanic: "It's a pretty rewarding career, and I still like to get my hands dirty. That's what the kids enjoy about me — I can relate to them."

By Alyssa Kneller