

For all those current LRRS participants who were not fortunate enough to have known Karen, I decided to reprint the article below. It was written by a good friend of hers and printed in the LRRS Inside Line newsletter, which was published in June of 1995. It explains why it is so fitting that that fund be named in her honor.

In Memorium

Karen “The Nurse” Hornbecker

Medical Director, Loudon Road Race Series and GP/Pro

In the Northeast Region of motorcycle road racing, there is a name that has been familiar to riders and participants for many years. That name has been synonymous with expert professionalism in medical emergency track situations and unsurpassed dedication to the sport, its riders and all of its participants. Karen Hornbecker, Medical Director, Loudon Road Race Series at New Hampshire International Speedway and GP/Pro at Bridgehampton Race Circuit in New York, died on April 21, 1995 from a short illness at her home in Flagler Beach, Florida.

Born May 17, 1946, Karen grew up in Woodbury, Connecticut. She worked at Waterbury Hospital in Waterbury, Connecticut as a surgical RN and retired in September 1994 after over twenty years. She had also worked as a Supervisor of Critical Care Pediatrics at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City and as a volunteer for the Woodbury, Connecticut Ambulance Association. She was well known for her expertise in the field of surgical nursing and was highly respected by her colleagues at Waterbury Hospital. We were fortunate here in the Northeast Region to have had the benefit of Karen’s services and enthusiasm for the past 15 years.

Karen’s involvement in motorcycle road racing began when she attended her first race in 1977. As is usually the case, her friend Al Hathway (presently the LRRS Chief of Technical Inspection) persuaded her to “take it to the track” after Karen insisted on sampling the roads of Connecticut sans motorcycle (read: road rash). Unfortunately, despite Al’s good intentions of trying to increase Karen’s safety by encouraging her to ride on the track, she crashed in her very first practice ever and was promptly run over by another novice rider who, of course, became another good friend of Karen’s. This introduction to our sport was not a deterrent to Karen and she was back the following year after her healing was complete.

Karen continued to race her 450 Honda Hawk and became an Expert over the next several years. She rode for Thomaston Honda and was a member of Team Litchfield. In 1986, Karen decided to bow out of racing after experiencing a lap that was, unfortunately, similar to her very first lap ever, except much more spectacular. On a

borrowed bike no less, Karen had a most acrobatic get-off at Turn 3, which at the old Bryar Motorsports Park, was a very fast turn. Karen escaped unharmed but the motorcycle never healed.

It was inevitable that eventually Karen's interest in racing would overlap her interest in nursing and she began to donate her time and knowledge to corner marshalling and on-track medical emergencies. Over the next decade, and indeed, until her death, she was known affectionately as "The Nurse". What made Karen so much of a presence was not necessarily her skill and professionalism with medical emergencies (although both were substantial), but her genuine love and caring for the racers themselves. There was almost no rider who raced more than a few seasons who had not known of Karen's exceptional care, good humor, and supremely wonderful bedside manner. This author was one of her more blithering patients more than once, and believe me, you cannot put a price on Karen's ability to console a hurt rider. She was exceptional.

Beside local races, Karen developed a passion for watching national and grand prix races. She worked at Daytona, Atlanta, Laguna and Ohio as well as our own national event at NHIS. As an example of her dedication to racing, the following is a story that touched all of us as her friends, and I'm sure saved at least one life. At Atlanta in September of 1994, Karen was spectating along the straight when Scott Doohan and Brad Hazen tangled and crashed very hard at a very high rate of speed. Karen ran down to the bleacher fence where she quickly realized that the riders were not responding to the corner workers. With the help of some friends, Karen climbed over the fence and ran to help. She determined that Scott Doohan was breathing and looked over to see Brad Hazen. He was obviously not breathing. Karen inserted an airway (which she always carried in her fanny pack), into Brad, made sure he was breathing, and waited for the ambulance. Her quick thinking saved Hazen from Brain damage if not death. Fortunately for the world of racing, this kind of action by Karen Hornbecker was the norm, not the exception.

The true test of a consummate professional is an unwillingness to let one's skills become stagnant. Karen was constantly devising new ways to improve racetrack safety and rider safety. She authored books, pamphlets and articles and articles covering racetrack safety and the treatment of accident trauma. She was one of the first to make racers aware of the importance of constantly drinking fluids to avoid dehydration during hot summer weekends. She also pioneered and taught helmet removal techniques for use on injured racers and riders with possible spinal and neck injuries. She taught ambulance crews at Loudon and Bridgehampton how standard procedures need to be modified for the special conditions and types of injuries encountered on the racetrack.

And to top it off, in the last several years, Karen worked with Diamond P Productions (TNN Television Network) at national road races. Intensely interested in promoting national live broadcasting of racing, Karen provided invaluable knowledge of the race scene and the riders that greatly enhanced the quality of the resulting nationally broadcast TV programs. She set the groundwork for future live coverage of motorcycle road racing in this country.

Last but not by far the least, Karen had a zany sense of humor that never quit, even in the most serious situations. Sometimes a sense of humor is the only thing that “works” for an injured rider. She understood the psychology of injury and especially traumatic injury and worked tirelessly to heal those racers who had the misfortune to require medical services at one point or another. Road racing has lost a valued and loved member of its family. Karen’s contributions will live on in obvious ways, such as in improved helmet removal techniques, ambulance procedures on track, dehydration emphasis on hot race days, live television network race coverage and exceptional professionalism and skill in medical trauma situations. Her contributions will also live on in not so obvious but no less important ways to all those who knew and loved her. Thank you Karen, for all you’ve done for us.

- Jackie Mickiewicz
Marlborough, CT