

## Biker gangs deny they are criminal groups

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Author: The Detroit News ; Paul Egan

America's best-known outlaw motorcycle **gang**, the California-based Hells Angels, has never established a foothold or chapter in Detroit, likely because of the strong presence by the Highwaymen and the Outlaws, officials say.

The Highwaymen **are** the largest area club designated an outlaw motorcycle **gang**, or **criminal** organization, by the FBI, said Bill Grills, supervisory special agent for the FBI's **gang criminal** enterprise program in Detroit.

Next largest in Detroit is the Chicago-based Outlaws, Grills said.

Two notable smaller outlaw **gangs are** the Toledo-based Iron Coffins and the east side Liberty Riders, but there **are** others, he said.

Spokesmen for both the Iron Coffins and the Liberty Riders denied Wednesday their clubs **are criminal** organizations, saying the clubs **are** brotherhoods of men who like to ride motorcycles and socialize and who also do significant charitable works.

The Outlaws did not respond to an e-mail request for interviews, and nobody answered the door Tuesday night at the Warren Avenue clubhouse. On its Web site, the club denies it is a **criminal** organization.

The Detroit Iron Coffins president, who would give only his nickname, "Harddrive," acknowledged then-president David Schwarz, now 52, was sent to federal prison in 1998 as a felon in possession of a firearm and two other Iron Coffins members were convicted of separate homicides involving young women in the 1970s.

But he said those events occurred many years ago and the club has changed. Also, he asked, if a member of the Kiwanis Club was convicted of murder, would that result in the entire club being branded a **criminal** organization?

Club bylaws prohibit **criminal** acts while wearing club colors, and the national president has ordered that **they** not be involved in any kind of **criminal** activities.

The club is increasingly known for its charitable works, such as contributions to Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor and a recent campaign that raised more than \$20,000 for a Toledo-area accident victim, he said.

In wiretapped telephone calls that **are** part of the government's case against 40 members of the Highwaymen, Aref "Scarface" Nagi of Sterling Heights, a former Highwaymen vice president and current honorary member who is jailed awaiting trial, talks about a dispute between the Highwaymen and the Liberty Riders. He discusses cracking a bottle over the head of a Liberty Riders member at an east side bar, after which Nagi said on the tape that he pistol-whipped the Liberty Rider, FBI Special Agent Edward Brzezinski testified.

The FBI could point to no notable convictions involving the Liberty Riders, but the **group** has been involved in turf battles with the Highwaymen and the FBI maintains it is an outlaw **gang** , not a social club, Special Agent Dawn Clenney said.

The president of the Detroit Liberty Riders, who would give only his nickname "T," said club members like to ride bikes and drink beer but **are** not involved in crime.

He, too, cited charitable works by his club, including involvement in Toys for Tots and Coats for Kids.

"T" did not want to comment on the Highwaymen, but said he was not aware of the incident Nagi described in the recorded phone conversation.

Former Outlaws national president Harry "Taco" Bowman was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List when he was arrested in Sterling Heights in 1999 and is now serving a life sentence on racketeering and conspiracy charges.

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