



BOB MARTIN/CITIZEN

EMMA AND ABBIE HORTON had the chance to get into Officer Jon Howe's police cruiser at the annual Laconia Kiwanis Bike Rodeo and Safety Day on Saturday.

## Learning about bicycle safety

### Laconia Kiwanis holds annual Bike Rodeo and Safety Day

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LACONIA — Bicycle safety is important for children to know, and each year, Laconia Kiwanis gives back to

the children of the Lakes Region by holding their Bike Rodeo and Safety Day at Opechee Park where children can receive a new helmet and possibly win a brand new bike.

Kiwanis Vice President Meredith Michaud said there were around 50 people who came out for the annual event that spanned from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and she said it is a great way for their organization to give back to the community. The event is totally free,

and has been going on for about a decade, Michaud said.

On Saturday, there was a free bike raffle that Kiwanis purchased from MC Cycle. For a suggested \$5 donation, people could bring their children to have them fitted for a brand new helmet. Michaud said the donation just goes toward paying for the helmets, and any other money they raised

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EMMA HORTON enjoyed riding her bike at the Laconia Kiwanis Bike Rodeo and Safety Day.

### BIKE

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throughout the day went toward charities to support children, such as helping with Got Lunch!, sponsoring a sports team or sending a child to camp.

"We are very involved in the community," said Michaud.

Throughout the day, they also provided free hot dogs, soda and water while children rode their bikes around the Opechee Park parking lot. They had officials on-hand from LRGHealthcare and from the Laconia Area Bicycle Exchange talking about different safety initiatives. MC Cycle also performed free bike safety inspections for any child who wanted it.

Also at the event were members of the Laconia Fire Department, who brought two trucks and an ambulance over for children to check out. The firefighters were there to answer any questions that they had.

Laconia Police Officer Jon Howe was also at the event to talk to children about bicycle safety and let them go inside his cruiser. Two of these children were 7-year-old Emma and 4-year-old Abbie Horton. Emma was also having a blast cruising around the parking lot on her bike with a huge smile on her face.

Howe said he has been a part of the event many times, and likes to be able to talk to the children and their families about the importance of wearing a helmet.

"The safety issue is that with helmets, it is state law for kids to be wearing them," said Howe. "We want to make sure the kids are following that rule. With Kiwanis providing free helmets, it helps us alleviate that issue. That's the best part about it. We usually get a couple helmets also, so people can come down to the police department and we can hand them out, as well."

Howe is a former bicycle officer, and said it is also good to be involved with children's lives and making sure they are being safe. He said they make a strong effort to encourage parents to tell their children to wear helmets, and also encourage the parents to wear the helmets themselves.

Howe said helmet use has increased over the years, saying it is much more common now, but police still see children riding around without them. He said there is a fine associated with this, but oftentimes, they will just talk to the children and educate them rather than enforce them.

"Education is really key here," said Howe. "We will always try to encourage children to try to wear a helmet and be safe."