

Akron attorney tells kids: wear helmets when biking

By KATHY ANTONIOTTI
For the Sun

NORTON Don't try to tell Mike Hilkert that wearing a helmet while bicycling is uncool. He'll tell you brain damage isn't very cool, either.

The Akron attorney discovered first-hand the value of wearing a safety helmet while cycling in Peninsula with his law partner Mike DelMedico, on an early summer morning bike ride three years ago.

"If I hadn't been wearing a helmet I wouldn't be talking to you today," Hilkert said of the accident that split his helmet in two, front to back.

Hilkert doesn't remember much about the accident, and while visiting area schools to tell elementary students about helmet safety, will defer to DelMedico to fill in the blank spots. He's not sure what caused the spill, whether he hit something in the road or slid on loose gravel, but he knows his helmet saved his life.

The accident occurred on a scenic spot, and so, the day of a

paramedic kneeling over him, and administering medical attention before an ambulance took him to Akron City Hospital.

"I had an extremely sore neck the next day," said Hilkert. He spent the night in the hospital, underwent a CAT Scan, and finally got a clean bill of health. "Luckily, the helmet absorbed the shock."

As a result of his experience, the partners in Scanlon & Gearing Co., located on South Main Street, decided to observe American Bike Month by awarding new bikes and helmets to children in 10 Summit County schools. Entries, expressing the value of bike safety, could be in the form of poems, raps or paragraphs. One winner was chosen per grade by the attorneys and staff based on creativity, originality and content.

Of those winners, a drawing was held at each school to determine who was the lucky bike winner.

"We wanted children to know that we wanted them to be safe," said

David Taz Bever, communications director for the firm.

The firm specializes in suits involving product liability, wrongful death, medical malpractice and personal injury.

"It takes an awareness of what can happen — for instance, looking at injuries from accidents involving cars with airbags and those without — to know that many injuries can be prevented," Hilkert attests. People in the firm have seen it all.

Almost all the students raised their hands when Hilkert asked how many of them owned helmets at a recent assembly in Copley. Two-thirds went down when Hilkert asked how many always wore their helmets.

"I probably wouldn't be here today if I only wore my helmet sometimes," he told the students.

Safety assemblies were held at Norton Intermediate and Grill Elementary schools to announce the winners. Norton Primary announced its winners previously. Students were not informed they were winners until the assemblies. Parents were advised, but asked to keep information secret so as to surprise the students, Bever said.

Norton Intermediate School winners include bike winner, Joseph Klaus, a fourth grader who wrote a rap, and helmet winners, Kevin Hadley, grade 5, who wrote about a personal experience when he was hit by a car, and Megan Brown, grade 4. Brown's entry included the wise advice that children wear helmets for other summer activities, including skate boarding and inline skating.

Collin Altir was the bike winner at Norton Primary. The second grader wrote a poetic entry. Helmet winners were Jennifer Merrick, grade 4, and kindergartner Jillian Intimer, who also entered safety poems.

Grill School winners included bike winner, second grader Benjamin Horgan, helmet winners, Nick Herrigan, grade 1, Tim Williams, grade 2, Jessica Newbrough, grade 1, Laura Amato, kindergarten and Amanda Gordon, grade 2.

Correction

NORTON — The wrong caption appeared under the picture of the bicycle winners in Norton last week. The caption should have read "winner of an all-terrain bike donated by Scanlon & Gearing, an LPA group from Akron, was Norton fourth grader Joe Klaus of Kranz Drive. Tammy O'Brien, Buck Gearing and Gerald Dammertlin, right to left, made the presentation. Helmet winners were Kevin Hadley and Megan Brown."

