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Memorial to be planned for founder of Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County

Founded Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County

By Charles Crumm, The Oakland Press

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When Bruce Madsen retired in 1993, he bought a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and hit the road on a trip that crossed much of the United States.

Riding is a habit he continued until just a couple years ago and perhaps fitting for the founder of the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County. His motorcycle trips took him through Nova Scotia and across Europe. He was also a pilot, sailing enthusiast and a collector of model trains.

“He had most of the modes of transportation covered,” said daughter Dede Madsen.

One of his trips involved a stop in Key West, Florida. With his hair greying and sporting a greying beard by that time, he entered an Ernest Hemingway look-alike contest. Another trip involved a lengthy stay in California and months spent helping to recondition a boat.

Sailing also involved sometimes competitive racing with his children as they were growing up, on small boat called a Whistler.

“His dream was to live on a boat,” Dede Madsen said.

As a pilot, he enjoyed flying gliders in his younger years and other planes in the years since.

Mr. Madsen, from Bloomfield Township, died Friday, July 25, following a short illness and just a few weeks shy of his 87th birthday.

Born in Provo, Utah, Aug. 21, 1925, Mr. Madsen enlisted in the U.S. Navy towards the end of World War II and then in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War. While stationed in Cheyenne, Wyoming, he was editor of the base newspaper.

He graduated magna cum laude from Michigan State University with the first degree in the country in highway traffic administration in 1957 and later added a master’s degree in 1965.

Ultimately, that led to the founding of the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County in 1967 with a mission to make roads safer and reduce traffic fatalities, and a 26-year career for Mr. Madsen.

Over the years, TIA developed partnerships with the Road Commission for Oakland County, local communities and local law enforcement agencies, promoted safety programs, compiled crash information, and looked at pavement safety issues.

That organization has since become the [Traffic Improvement Association of Michigan](#), located in Auburn Hills, and its mission continues.

“He left an important legacy in place, which is the Traffic Improvement Association,” said Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. “It literally saved, over the years, hundreds of lives. That’s not a bad legacy to leave behind.”

Jim Santilli, the current director of TIA, agreed.

“As the first leader of TIA, Bruce was a positive role model who dedicated his life to reducing injuries and fatalities on our roads,” Santilli said. “Many people are alive today that would not have been if Bruce hadn’t made traffic safety a top priority in Oakland County in 1967.”

TIA started, literally, by traffic accident when a professor of French was killed in a traffic crash in front of Oakland University in the 1960s, recalled Frank Cardimen, who succeeded Madsen as TIA’s director.

At the time, OU was a satellite of Michigan State University. The same week, two children were killed in fatal accidents, Cardimen said.

OU Chancellor Woody Varner contacted MSU President John Hanna, who in turn selected Mr. Madsen to initially conduct a research study in the county.

“Bruce came over thinking he’d do this research project and go back to MSU,” Cardimen said. Instead, he set up seven committees involving 200 people, which came up with more than 90 points of action to keep roads and people safe in Oakland County.

“One was the establishment of TIA to make sure the other points were implemented,” Cardimen said. “They asked Bruce if he would do it.”

Initial funding was \$10,000 from Oakland County and \$10,000 from General Motors. Then Mr. Madsen got in touch with the Road Commission for Oakland County and worked with former managing director John L. Grubba to make traffic safety the No. 1 priority and to incorporate crash data into road project planning.

“Bruce reached out to the road commission,” Cardimen said. “It was that relationship that allowed for the support and growth of TIA. TIA was Bruce. He was a pioneer.”

When TIA was founded in 1967, 163 people died that year in traffic accidents in Oakland County, according to TIA. In 2013, 54 people died in traffic crashes in Oakland County.

The reduction over the years takes on greater significance since the population of the county today is much larger and the number of miles driven in Oakland County is much higher than in 1967.

During his tenure at TIA, Mr. Madsen was also Traffic Committee Chairman for the World Safety Organization, and a member of the Association of Safety Council Executives and the International and Michigan Associations of Chiefs of Police.

Besides extensive travel during retirement, Mr. Madsen stayed active in the community, participating in local community theaters, recording for Reading for the Blind and delivering Meals on Wheels. He was also chairman of the Bloomfield Senior Men's Club.

"Even after he was getting sick, he was still delivering Meals on Wheels," Dede Madsen said.

Possessing a deep baritone voice, Mr. Madsen also did some radio work, voice-overs and announcing at events like car races, his daughter recalled.

Mr. Madsen is also remembered for his sense of humor. He once took his friend, the late former Michigan Gov. George Romney, to a farm to see a breed of sheep named Romney.

"He wanted him to meet the sheep," Dede Madsen said.

Mr. Madsen is survived by his children Dede, Juli and Matt. His wife of 61 years, Sonja, died in 2012.

A memorial will be planned at a later date. The family asks that contributions be made to [The Nature Conservancy](#) in lieu of flowers.

URL: <http://www.theoaklandpress.com/general-news/20140801/memorial-to-be-planned-for-founder-of-traffic-improvement-association-of-oakland-county>

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