

Angles on TV show

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By MORRIS STEPHENSON -

After writing about and photographing Mark Angle's memorial motorcycle in last week's News-Post, I was one of apparently many residents who tuned in to the History Channel's "Counting Cars" show last Tuesday night.

The last 30-minute segment featured Mark and Judy's journey after he commissioned Danny "The Count" Koker and his team to build the bike to memorialize the deaths of seven sailors, who were aboard the cruiser USS Belknap that was struck by the USS John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier on Nov. 22, 1975.

The Angles' part of the program opened with the couple going to Danny's shop in Las Vegas, where the agreement was made and the bike was built from scratch. The shows tracked how plans were developed and the construction as it progressed along the path to completion. That part was very interesting.

I was impressed with the patriotism shown and proudly displayed by "The Count" as he talked about the collision and loss of the sailors, who died in the fire when jet fuel from the carrier spilled onto the smaller cruiser.

But from all the conversations I heard the day after the show, everyone was impressed with the last part of the program. That was when the memorial motorcycle was "revealed" for the first time on the USS Iowa. Mark and Judy were taken to the ship where they were met by leader Danny and other members of his team. I noticed a group of people standing in the background on the ship with their backs to the camera. But I didn't think anything about it.

Then Danny told the couple he wanted to get some more people in the photograph and called over the group. As it turned out, the "people" were former sailors who served aboard the USS Belknap, including one whom Mark knew.

Then there were more former crew members who served aboard the Belknap and an elderly gentleman in a wheelchair who had a snow-white beard. He turned out to be the ship's Capt. Dick Shafer, whom Mark credited for saving many lives by his quick decision and action taken just before the impact.

"If he had not turned the Belknap when he did, the carrier would have cut it in half, rather than cutting off the front top part of the Belknap," said an emotional Angle. And Mark thanked the captain on camera, saying basically what he told me the week ago when I got the pics and info for the story.

Danny then called for the rider, who had been hidden from the camera, to bring the motorcycle around for all to see. Both Mark and Judy were astounded and became emotional when they got their first glimpse at the bike, painted a shiny ship-gray color. More tears came into the eyes of Mark, Judy and a number of others in the crowd. The next day I heard about tears being shed in front of the TVs that night.

I must admit my eyes became moist on a couple of occasions during the show, and I was proud to say I've known Mark and Judy for years. I was especially proud of what Mark did in commissioning the \$35,000 memorial motorcycle.

You could tell Danny and his team were equally as proud of being a part of the project. Danny made it plain when he thanked Mark for letting him and the team be a part of the project.

And being the patriotic person that I am, I want to thank Mark for what he did and also for giving me the



opportunity to write the first story and take the first "public" pictures of the "USS Belknap Bike" that memorializes the seven Belknap sailors whose lives were taken on a date that also marked the 12th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. It was an honor for to be a tiny part of the final story.