

FOUNDED IN 1975

HOME OF THE KIRKWOOD, MO.  
Crown Royals MC.



## Clubhouse Fulfills A Dream

by Adriane Hall

Keeping kids off the street and "working together for God and country" were the foundations on which Joe Cole helped found Club 44 in Kirkwood.

Designed to find jobs for junior high schoolers and create friendships and mentor relationships, Club 44 had almost everything but an actual clubhouse. An abandoned building on Memphis Street in the Meacham Park neighborhood of Kirkwood presented a solution to that dilemma.

"The kids inspired it," Cole said. "They (members of the Kirkwood community) were fixing to tear it down, and the kids said, 'Oh, we could fix it up.'"

The idea, which seemed to reflect the mission of the club itself, quickly became a reality. Club 44 teamed up with the Crown Royal Motorcycle Club and a year, thousands of dollars and a lot of teamwork later, the abandoned building has been transformed into a neighborhood meeting place.

The club turned the shabby lot and nearly-ruined building into a gathering place for Crown Royal Motorcycle

Club without any outside help.

According to Cole, the rehabbed building now serves the needs of both young and old in Meacham Park.

"This is our pride and joy because we didn't have to use government money," Cole said.

The group paid for the \$85,000 renovation out of its own funds and did all of the work themselves. Cole said many people think black men never do anything, but he said the renovation of the clubhouse proved all the naysayers wrong.

Gus Parker, a member of the motorcycle club since 1975, helped direct the project and has a number of photos of the work.

"I was in good shape then," he said.

When the group started on the project, doors and windows had all been boarded up. The one-time apartment building had been vacant since its owner had been murdered with an axe inside the house. No one wanted to tackle such a large and worrisome renovation project.

"Most people thought it was impossible to do, so they backed off," Parker said.

photo by Bill Burekhalter

The group also teamed up with the Sisters of Loretto, since the building renovations had been drawn up and started by Sister Helen Santamaria. Though she left shortly after work on the building began, the Crown Royals and Club 44 continued to work together until the building was complete.

Cole joked that some touches, like crucifixes and other religious items — including railings from a convent — were placed in the house to keep with the Sisters of Loretto side of the project.

"Gotta' make sure you keep everyone happy," Cole said, who is a 35-year associate of the Sisters of Loretto organization.

Cole said the Sisters of Loretto come back to the building every summer for a picnic. He added that he can never get the sisters to leave when the afternoon is over.

In addition to the sisters' annual visits, the clubhouse can be reserved for free by any not-for-profit organization looking for a place to meet or host an event. The American Legion,

AmVets and the Auxiliary are the building's top users, Cole said. The Crown Royals meet the second Sunday of every month at the clubhouse. It also serves as a "complimentary hotel" for motorcyclists who might be passing through town.

The first floor of the building houses a complete bar, two bathrooms and a large seating area, complete with a jukebox. The second floor holds a pool table and electronic dartboard, two restrooms, a lounge and a locker room for Crown Royal members, complete with nametags such as Windy-Poo, Godfather and Sugar-Foot Stitts. Couches and other restrooms are available on the third floor of the building.

Cole and Parker are very proud of their work, and jokingly stress the importance of the bathrooms.

There are six bathrooms as opposed to one," Cole said.

In March, club members will be able to see whether their work has paid off. Cole nominated the group for an award from the Kirkwood Area Chamber of Commerce.