

THE LTFUC '80TH ANNIVERSARY' LEGENDARY OUTING TO SOUTHEND-ON-SEA by Ray Levy

A special huge thank you from the Honorary Committee of the London Taxidriers' Fund for Underprivileged Children to all the wonderful drivers and child carers who attended our '80th Anniversary' Southend Outing. The forecast for the whole day was 'heavy rain' but 97 drivers turned up to give the children a great day out – sincere thanks from us and the children. We were very pleased to welcome at Victoria Park the Alderman and Sheriff of the City of London, Mr Ian Luder and Mrs Lin Luder, The Master, Mr Roger Smaridge and The Clerk, Mr Michael Henderson-Begg CC, from The Worshipful Company of Tin Plate Workers and the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Councillor Mohammed Abdus Salique.



Also in the park to welcome the children were Cartoon Network's characters 'Four Arms' from TV 's 'Ben Ten' and Powerpuff Girl 'Bubbles'. Heart Radio had their two ground patrol cars and were giving out lots of goodies and balloons to the children and with their music blaring away, they really created a great atmosphere. The park was buzzing with excitement as the children were allocated to their taxis, then the huge convoy set off. 120 vehicles, included the

committee, RAC and St John's Ambulance, all led by the City of London Police Outriders (Roads Policing Unit) who did an excellent job escorting us there and back safely in such treacherous conditions. A half way 'wee' stop was made at the Palms Hotel, Hornchurch. The City of London Police outriders were joined by the Essex Police outriders at the hotel.

On arrival at the Cliffs Pavilion, Honorary Chairman David Lessman made a speech welcoming everyone and thanked everybody who had made the day possible. After a hastily consumed hot pasta or chicken lunch for the drivers and nuggets and chips for the children, followed by ice creams for all, the children were ferried down to the sea front by buses, which had been specially laid on for them. Special thanks go to Brian Houssart of the Southend Taxi Drivers Charity Fund for Children, who worked very hard ferrying the wheelchair children down to the sea front and back again in his mini bus. Drivers were given £5 to spend on each child and had a choice of going to either Adventure Island or the Sea Life Centre, which were both completely free. For those who braved a wet and deserted Adventure Island, there were no long queues and they had a great time, though not so sure about the drivers and helpers who had chosen to wear flip flops!!



At 5pm it was back to the Cliffs Pavilion for tea and a disco. David Lessman once again took to the stage and welcomed the Mayor of Southend, Councillor Gwen Horrigan, MBE who presented The Terry Stapleton Rose Bowl to the winner of the best decorated taxi, Steven Bell (Cab No. 52). His cab was decorated as a Batmobile, with Steven dressed as Batman and his wife Wendy dressed as Robin and they both looked just great. Steven spends a lengthy amount of time getting his cab ready for the outings and puts a lot of thought into it and his fantastic imagination has won him first prize for best-decorated cab for the last four years. We were, therefore, very pleased to invite him to join us in the prestigious Lord Mayor's Show in November. Councillor Gwen Horrigan then made a speech welcoming us all to Southend.



The Honorary Chairman called for Sergeant Martin Warner (commonly

known as Jack Warner) of the City of London Police and Mr Rory O'Sullivan of the RAC to join him on stage and presented them both with certificates making them Honorary Life Members of the Fund following their many years of support and service to us.

Driver Leonard Harrington and his helper Margaret Best were next to come on stage and presented the fund's Honorary Life President, Bill Tyzack, BEM, with a cheque for £425, donated by the Hilton in the Community Foundation (Hilton Hotel, Euston, London), who have very kindly chosen us as their charity. The last surprise in store came when David Lessman turned to a very shocked and overwhelmed Lennie and presented him with an inscribed black miniature porcelain taxi, which was in appreciation of the 40 years of loyal support that Lennie has given us as a driver on our outings – well done Lennie.



Then the children took to the dance floor and were thrilled when music from their favourite 'High School Musical' came on and we thank DJ Dave Davies and his team. Balloonists Mr Chippy and Tony Hanscombe had come from London to make numerous balloons for the children and together with Southend's Salvo the Clown and young magicians Ryan Sholem and James Holdsworth kept the children amused. The Queen and two Princesses from the Southend Carnival Court also joined us and went on stage to teach the children various dance moves. We thank Alan Jones, the Court Manager, for all his efforts in getting the girls to join us and for rapidly taking them down to the wet sea front to wave us on our way home. Thanks also to Essex MGM Inflatables of Southend for helping us out at the last moment and providing a face painter to join us. Being on her own she had a mammoth task, with a long queue of children wanting their faces painted and we are deeply grateful to Ellie Winston of Fantasy Faces in Rayleigh and her helper Ben.

Sadly the afternoon had to come to an end and at 6.15pm a conga led the children out of the room, where they were all given Rucksacks as a memento of the day. The drivers were also given leather money bags as a thank you, along with diesel vouchers, which had been donated by an anonymous donor.

As if this wasn't enough, there was still more fun to come!!! The Hadleigh Fire Station crew were eagerly waiting for the convoy to pass by on the return journey and when we arrived, the firemen immediately turned their hoses on us – weren't the drivers wet enough? The children were squealing with delight on seeing their drivers getting a further soaking and seeing the laughter on their faces was what the day was all about!!

We extend our grateful thanks to everyone who was involved in making the outing possible including BBC London Radio 94.9 fm for their all day coverage of the outing and their Reporter, Alison Freeman, who joined us at Victoria Park and travelled in one of the taxis with



children to Southend. The weary convoy arrived back safe and sound at Victoria Park around 9pm and it was hard to find a puddle free area to stand in to thank the convoy of drivers as they left. The camaraderie on this outing, especially on such a wet day, was amazing and somehow extra special and this in turn gave the children a day filled with happiness and non-stop laughter. To see one child smile on an outing is priceless, let alone 300 and this particular outing made me feel so proud of my fellow cabbies – what a great lot they are - 'Salt of the Earth'!!



"Looking forward to the next trip", they called out as they were leaving the park!!! Personally I can't wait!

As for the Committee, congratulations for pulling off such a trouble free, brilliant and memorable outing on such a wet day. More images from the outing can be found in the photo gallery on our website at www.ltfuc.org.uk