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In Rochelle Park, a focus on health - and Harleys

Saturday, February 13, 2010

BY ALFA GARCIA
THE RECORD
STAFF WRITER

2 Comments

ROCHELLE PARK — A crowd of leather-clad bikers was out in full force early Saturday at the Harley-Davidson/Buell store — but this time they weren't revving up for a brisk morning ride.



CARMINE GALASSO / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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Fernando Alvarez of Clifton, right, and John Bibas of Oakland, center wearing sunglasses, as well as other bikers at the Harley Davidson dealership in Rochelle Park participated in a blood drive with the Bergen County Dept. of Health Services.

Instead, the mostly male crowd, many sporting biker jackets and Harley-Davidson sweatshirts, lined up to donate blood and peruse informational tables on prostate-cancer screenings, smoking and other health conditions as part of "Gentlemen, Check Your Engines," an annual health-awareness event at the motorcycle dealership.

The brainchild of Virgil H. Simons, president and founder of The Prostate Net in Hackensack, the partnership with Harley-Davidson/Buell and the Bergen County Department of Health Services aims to bring attention to often-ignored health issues for men.

"One of the things we've noticed about guys is they don't want to know if there are any health problems," said Simons, a prostate-cancer survivor. "So we thought, 'well, guys care more about their cars and their motorcycles than they do about their health, so why don't we have an event that brings those two together?'"

Because the Harley-Davidson store does heavy marketing for the event — Simons says it drew nearly 300 last year — the majority of participants are Harley-Davidson riders, including members of the Bergen County Harley Owners Group, based in Rochelle Park.

"I'm a regular blood donor and I feel it's my civic duty to do it," said Steve Braverman, of Glen Rock, who attends the event yearly with BCHOG.

Fellow BCHOG member Pete Pappas, of River Edge, said he doesn't go to the doctor as often as he should, and is grateful for the event. "I think it's great, it's terrific. I think more people should be aware of it, since it's for your personal health."

The Harley-Davidson store had been holding February blood drives with yearly before combining the drive with "Gentlemen, Check Your Engines" in 2008. Saturday's participating health centers and programs included Community Blood Services, The Valley Hospital, Community Tobacco Program, Holy Name Hospital, Cancer Education and Early Detection Program, Hackensack University Medical Center, US-TOO and North Hudson Community Action Corporation, which provided free blood pressure, blood glucose,

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cholesterol and oral cancer screenings. Leaflets and health representatives were on-hand from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and free bandannas were given to the first 200 attendees.

Rich Croland, director of marketing and promotions at the Harley-Davidson/Buell store, says the event's non-invasive, comfortable setting makes all the difference. "They're doing this with their brethren, so-to-speak, so it's not taboo. They do it as a large group and it's in an environment that's safe."

The awareness event also takes place in other Harley-Davidson locations in the U.S. and in Australia throughout the year.

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