

**Camarillo Acorn** – September 22, 2006

## Camarillo is first 'Harley Hop' for cancer survivors

Ride is through California

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**HOG HEAVEN**-Employees from the Ventura Harley-Davidson store in Camarillo will host a breakfast for a dozen Amazon Heart Thunder breast cancer survivors from across the country and Australia when they ride into town as part of journey to raise awareness and funds for cancer support programs. The Camarillo stop is one on a route from Los Angeles to San Francisco. HarleyDavidson is loaning new motorcycles to the riders.

They certainly are not the dirty dozen. But they will be riding "hogs" into town next week.

Twelve women, breast cancer survivors from all over the U.S. and Australia, will take part in the Amazon Heart Thunder ride, an 800mile weeklong motorcycle trek to raise awareness and money for cancer support programs.

The women will be served breakfast at Ventura HarleyDavidson in Camarillo on Sept. 24, the first stop or "Harley Hop" on their route from Los Angeles to San Francisco. They'll stop along the way for meals at other Harley-Davidson shops.

Tracey Warner, coowner of the Camarillo store, had lost a friend and sister-in-law to breast cancer and didn't hesitate to lend her support when the HarleyDavidson factory in Milwaukee, Wisc., one of the sponsors, called.

"It's a good cause," she said. "I don't know anybody who doesn't know somebody" with breast cancer.

"It's really awe-inspiring to see the women come in," she said.

This is the second year Thunder riders, who pay their own expenses and commit to raising \$5,000 for the cause, have stopped in Camarillo. The money will go to the Young Survival Coalition and Amazon Heart support activities.

Besides bringing attention to the unique needs of young women with breast cancer, the ride provides peer support and a chance for the women to spend time with other survivors.

It's a chance "to share, connect, bond and heal," said Megan Dwyer, cofounder of Amazon Heart.

The nonprofit group not only raises money for breast cancer programs but takes a "victor, not victim" approach in its support to survivors.

Women can join a variety of Amazon Heart adventures. In December a group of breast cancer survivors will travel to India to build an orphanage for children left parentless by the 2004 tsunami and the AIDS epidemic. Last year, Amazon adventurers built houses for the poor in the slums of Sri Lanka.

Dwyer, who recently marked her fourth year of remission, founded Amazon Heart along with fellow survivor Meredith Campbell of Australia.

Dwyer, who lives in Northern California, met Campbell by chance while on a trip to Australia. Campbell was about 18 months ahead of Dwyer in her cancer treatment. Having so much in common, the two struck up a friendship and came up with a tangible, if not unique, way to support other young women living with breast cancer.

Their issues, different from those of their postmenopausal counterparts, include fertility and pregnancy, the onset of early menopause, problems in career advancement and the drain on financial resources. Mortality rates are higher, research shows, and the disease tends to be more aggressive in younger women.

"It is a group that's underserved because there are not enough of us to warrant as much attention," Dwyer said. What's more, traditional

support groups can have a depressing tone, Dwyer said. As the only person under 40 in one support group she tried, Dwyer said she didn't feel the other women understood the issues she faced.

Dwyer said the group hopes to demonstrate to other organizations the value of a different approach to supporting people with lifethreatening illnesses. Research was conducted on the benefits their adventures had for women adjusting to life after cancer; the results will be published within the next six months in *Psycho-Oncology* magazine, she said.

The California ride is one of three held every year- there was one in the United Kingdom last month and an Australia ride is scheduled in October.

For information on Amazon Heart or the ride, visit [www.amazonheart.org](http://www.amazonheart.org).