

review

Harley's angel

*Robyn rides
for breast
cancer*



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In the garden



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This month's Review cover features Springwood resident and cancer survivor Robyn Hines.

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Amidst all the doom and gloom we are constantly fed daily through radio and TV, we have had a number of positives for the Mountains in recent weeks. Foremost was Blue Mountains Tourism's national award win for the Greater Blue Mountains Drive project. This was another accolade for the drive which also won gold in the New Tourism Development category of the NSW Tourism Awards.

The wins were a fitting reward for the effort put in to the project by BM Tourism executive officer Kerry Fryer and her team over the last three years.

Good news also to hear that sale of tickets for the 14th Blue Mountains Music Festival were up by 20 per cent on last year's figures.

Local tourism accommodation figures have also been up in the past two months.

Another positive is that house and land sales are on the increase in Western Sydney, helping real estate firms to keep staff.

Then there are the efforts of the energetic Biznet organisation, which has just arranged its first Blue Mountains Business Expo at the Carrington Hotel where the spotlight is to be on services that local firms can provide.

Another major event saw the legal documentation signed off by the organising committee to make the Katoomba and Upper Mountains Community Bank a reality, with a possible mid-July opening. Chair of the local community bank steering committee, Robert Stock, congratulated the committee of volunteers that put in hundreds of hours to get the bank to this stage. "In these tougher times we can't afford to let the profits of local banking leave our community. Under this model of banking the profits from the locally owned branch are in large part ploughed straight back into providing facilities and services to strengthen our community," he said.

Altogether it's been a good news month. Here's hoping for more. Who knows, we might even earn the title of being a 'can do' city.

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Living high on the hog



Breast cancer survivor Robyn Hines says her Harley-Davidson Sportster made her feel "happy to be alive".

Shoulders of support were in short supply when Robyn Hines braved a two year ordeal with breast cancer. But after getting the all-clear it's a different story as she prepares to fire up her Harley-Davidson and thunder alongside dozens of other women whose lives have been up-ended by the illness. MATTHEW RUFUS reports.

FOR Robyn Hines, the gleaming steel pipes and distinctive rumble of a Harley-Davidson motorcycle is an overpowering allure that evades description. "It's just the way Harleys are," said the Springwood mother of two. "I can't really explain it."

Whereas her weakness for bikes bearing the iconic US manufacturer's stamp is shrouded in a haze of exhaust fumes, defining the hog's eye-melting road appeal is anything but elusive.

"Nothing quite turns heads like a chick on a Harley," she laughs.

Chiropractors will no doubt be gleefully rubbing their hands together come May 22. That's when 42 leather-clad 'chicks', including Robyn, will saddle up and embark on a ride from Brisbane to Sydney – leaving a trail of strained necks in their wake.

The eight day odyssey is called Amazon Heart Thunder, a charity event sponsored by Harley-Davidson in which participants are united by more than just their love of the two-wheeled machines. Each rider is a breast cancer survivor.

"Over the course of a week, we will raise awareness . . . about women living with breast cancer, challenge media stereotypes, raise funds and continue along our own personal path of growth and healing by building a supportive community with fellow survivors," said Robyn.

"I consider myself privileged . . . to be in a position to participate in this ride, to help those who are still on their cancer journey."

Money raised will be funnelled into Amazon Heart programs which help support women dealing with the disease.

While these days breast cancer is not the death sentence it once was, it still claims the lives of about 2800 Australian women each year, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Almost 13,400 cases of breast cancer were diagnosed in 2008.

"Breast cancer can be an emotionally devastating and isolating illness, and support programs like Amazon Heart are essential to women's recovery," said Robyn.

She is speaking from the heart. Early in 2006, Robyn was referred to a surgeon after discovering a small but painful lump in her right breast. The two years that followed became a blur of check-ups and operations which entailed a double mastectomy followed by reconstructive surgeries.

But long before then the cancer had taken an intangible toll.

"The psychological fight takes a lot out of you," she said.

"I felt myself becoming this weaker, dependent

person, but I had no one to be dependent on.

"My daughter would drive me to hospital, but it's the doctors' appointments, sitting at home trying to get over operations and getting your head around what's happening while maintaining a positive outlook – that's where there was no support."

Robyn said she retreated into a world of her own, to the point where she avoided being out in public altogether.

So severe was her isolation that she eventually organised a post office box for her home address as a way of pushing herself beyond the front door and back into town.

Returning to her vivacious self was clearly not about to happen overnight.

"One day I thought about what I could do to go back to that feeling of being high on life, because that's the sort of person I used to be," said Robyn.

Soon after her initial diagnosis she began toying with the idea of buying a motorcycle – specifically, a Harley – but figured illness had robbed her of the strength needed to ride one.

It was a nagging desire that she eventually gave into. But rather than roaring her new Harley-Davidson Sportster along the motorway with the wind in her hair, the bike was instead wheeled into the garage and cloaked beneath a blanket.

"I wasn't in a position to ride it. It was in the garage as an incentive to get myself out again," she said.

Weeks after being told by doctors she was free of cancer, last August Robyn made good on her personal goal and rolled the bike out into the daylight for its maiden ride.

Since then she has clocked up thousands of kilometres cruising the roads, admitting to giving the throttle "a boot full" every so often.

Looking back on her experience with breast cancer, Robyn considers herself "one of the lucky ones".

"Although I have been through two years of treatments, there are women out there going through a lot worse than me."

As part of Robyn's fund-raising commitment to Amazon Heart, she has organised a poker run from Blacktown Harley-Davidson to be held on March 29. Robyn is quick to stress the event is open to all makes of motorcycles.

"Breast cancer doesn't discriminate and neither do I," she said.

To make a donation, pre-register for the poker run or find out more details phone Robyn on 0412 779-446. Donations are also accepted on-line at www.amazonheart.org/ahthunder

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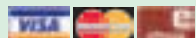
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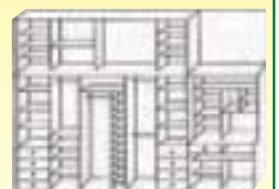
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