

A huge motorcycle rally aimed at getting the city in on the action of the Harley Davidson anniversary celebration comes with concerns

It is safe to say that when the Port Washington Main Street program was started more than four years ago no one expected it would sponsor a motorcycle rally that could fill the downtown with 20,000 Harley-Davidson owners and their machines.

Yet that is exactly what Main Street is doing with an event on Aug. 30 that it is calling Rock the Harbor. And, yes, organizers are predicting it will attract 15,000 to 20,000 riders and Harleys.

Port Washington Main Street's mission, to be carried out with the assistance of the state Main Street organization, is essentially the economic redevelopment of the downtown. What does a massive motorcycle rally have to do with that? Good question.

Part of Main Street's reason for existence is promotion, and its greatest success has been in this area, with events such as the Community Street Festival, Kiss of Indulgence and the Maritime Heritage Festival, all run effectively by the corps of volunteers Main Street has organized. But it has never done a promotion like Rock the Harbor.

The name is only partially descriptive of the event—it's going to rock things, all right, not just the harbor area, but the entire downtown, with reverberations throughout the city from 3 to 11 p.m. on Friday of the Labor Day weekend.

Franklin Street, Washington Street and a block of Grand Avenue will be closed to traffic. Marina parking lots and nearby parks will be commandeered for the event. Marina launching ramps will be closed. Bands will play and motorcycles will rumble throughout the duration of the rally.

Rock the Harbor organizers associated with Main Street, who are working with a Harley-Davidson dealer from Thiensville in putting on the event, are confident in predicting one of the largest crowds in Port Washington history because hundreds of thousands of Harley owners will be in the Milwaukee area during the week of Aug. 26 for Harley-Davidson's 110th anniversary celebration.

It should be a great time for the bikers—partying with kindred spirits on a summer afternoon and night in a pretty place by the lake with plenty of music and refreshments and, for variety, a selection of inviting restaurants, bars and shops nearby.

Whether it will be a great time for Port Washington residents is another story. Certainly some will want to join the party, listen to the music and check out the arrayed Harleys. But those who

Like it or not, Harley party will rock Port

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want to enjoy one of the last days of summer by launching their boats to go fishing or visiting downtown parks or taking in the ambience of the lakefront will probably not find the event so enjoyable.

The many residents who live downtown in townhouses, condominiums and apartments will be participants in the festivities, at least in an auditory way, whether they want to be or not.

Unlike other downtown events, which are geared to appeal to residents and non-residents alike, Rock the Harbor will mainly be for visitors who will take over the downtown and waterfront for an eight-hour party.

Some in the city have criticized the event as out of character with a community whose appeal derives from quiet enjoyment of its splendid aesthetics and historic downtown embracing a beautifully developed lakefront. On the other hand, many downtown business people, a number of whom will move their wares outside in vendor tents, are enthused about the Harley rally. That's understandable, considering the magic of the Harley-Davidson name.

Truly one of America's great brands, the Wisconsin company's iconic products are emblematic of the free spirit ingrained in the American psyche. Moreover, Harley customers span demographic categories in age, income and occupation but are similar in that they are invested heavily, both financially and emotionally, in their two-wheeled machines, and represent a powerful consumer force.

Rock the Harbor organizers see the event as an opportunity for Port Washington to bathe in some of the reflected glory of Harley-Davidson.

We hope that pays dividends and downtown businesses have a tremendously successful day on Aug. 30, and this newspaper will support the event with continuing coverage as planning progresses and in other ways.

Rock the Harbor is not likely to be repeated anytime soon (at least not until the next Harley anniversary). Which is fine, because Main Street has more important work to do.