

Harley event could bring 20,000 riders to Port in 2013

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Main Street plan for street festival held in conjunction with motorcycle maker's anniversary bash endorsed by council

Port Washington will be in hog heaven next year.

City officials on Tuesday gave their approval to a plan by Port Washington Main Street and Suburban Harley-Davidson in Thiensville to host a street festival in conjunction with the iconic motorcycle-maker's 110th anniversary celebration over Labor Day weekend 2013.

The festival, which is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 29, would be held at the beginning of the anniversary celebration, organizers said.

It would run from 3 to 11 p.m. and initial estimates are that it could draw as many as 20,000 people to downtown Port, Main Street Executive Director Sara Grover said.

"This would be a massive undertaking," Grover said. "We never take an event lightly."

Suburban officials will seek Harley-Davidson's endorsement to see if the event could be designated as an official part of the anniversary celebration, said Amy Gannon, a member of the organizing committee. If the company endorses it, the festival would be listed on the official anniversary celebration tickets that will go out to roughly 500,000 riders, she said.

Even if it isn't endorsed by the corporation, it will still go on, organizers said.

The one-time festival, which would be patterned after Main Street's Community Street Festival, would be held on Franklin Street and Grand Avenue, stretching from the foot of St. Mary's Hill to the corner of Wisconsin and Franklin streets next to City Hall. Among the attractions would be music, a variety of vendors from within the city and outside the community and fireworks.

Local businesses would be encouraged to stay open until 10 p.m. that day.

"There are a lot of great ideas right now," said Cathy Wilger, a member of the organizing committee. "The excitement seems to be growing as more and more people find out about this."

Funding for the festival would come largely through sponsorships and in-kind donations, the organizers said. Grover said she will also seek a grant to help defray expenses.

Ald. Jim Vollmar said that, although he likes the idea of the festival, he is worried that the city may not attract many of the motorcycle riders. When Harley celebrated its centennial, the city prepared for an influx of visitors but only a few showed up, he said.

"I'm enthusiastic about this, but I'm concerned we might get ready for a big party and no one

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comes,” he said.

Gannon noted that Suburban Harley is one of the state’s largest Harley-Davidson dealerships, and the company decided it wanted to host a celebration in Port. That support will help draw people to the city for the event, she said.

“Everything we’re doing is to truly set us apart from the other block parties (being held by other dealerships in conjunction with the anniversary celebration),” Gannon said.

Wilger also noted that Suburban Harley is talking about developing a lakefront motorcycle ride that would lead enthusiasts to Port Washington.

City officials were enthusiastic about the idea.

“Obviously we’re a tourist town. We like bringing people into our community. This is a unique event,” Ald. Dan Becker said. “I don’t see anything bad that can come of this.”

Ald. Paul Neumyer, a retired Mequon police officer and current acting Thiensville police chief, said that when Suburban last hosted a party for Harley’s anniversary, everything went smoothly.