

Partners in Prevention

Putting a Face on the Rally

More about the
Sturgis Rally:
Creating the poster

TALK TO JUST ABOUT ANYONE who lives or works in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and one common theme emerges: it is not just a scenic area dominated by a sprawling federal forest. It is where people live. It is where people play. It is who they are.

So when devastating wildfires hit the “Hills” in the summer of 2002, it wasn’t just someone else’s problem. It was personal. Vigilance soared. And so did the fear of more fires.

It was hot. It was dry. And nearly 500,000 motorcyclists were coming to the Hills for the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, a weeklong event of riding and racing held every August.

That fear put fire-prevention efforts front and center. And it helped to build a unique

public-private partnership that set out to make a difference.

The objective was to create and produce a symbolic image that would capture the attention of rallygoers and convey an all-important message: “Don’t Burn the Rally.”

The message had been developed by a national wildfire prevention and education team, brought to South Dakota at the request of Black Hills National Forest officials to create and execute a public fire education campaign for area visitors.

It just so happens that the majority of those visitors were a unique audience—motorcyclists. So team members began brainstorming. An idea began to form. And the hunt for help was on.

Al Rieman, president
of Black Hills Harley-
Davidson





Maury LaRue, firefighter and photographer

The hunt for help

The team needed something visual that could tie the prevention message to the rally. And they needed it fast. The rally was beginning the next day. That's when team leader Bud Rotroff found Al Rieman.

Rieman is the president of Black Hills Harley-Davidson, a motorcycle dealership with stores in Rapid City and Sturgis, the heart of the rally. He was born and reared in the Black Hills. And he knew only too well that danger was never far away.

"Living here, our awareness was quite high," said Rieman. "Every day, you would kind of scan the horizon looking for telltale signs of fire. These are our Hills. And if there is danger to the Hills, we take it personally. It's not like, 'Well, the government forest is going to burn down.' It would be like setting fire to my garage."

Collaboratively, Rieman and the team hit on the idea of incorporating a motorcycle into the image that would be used to sell the fire-prevention theme.

And Rieman had just the bike in mind—a 2003 FLHTC Dresser, one of three models made specially to commemorate the manufacturer's 100th anniversary.

Harley-Davidson was set to publicly unveil the special models at the rally. Everyone was waiting to see them. Rieman knew that

anything showing one of those motorcycles would attract attention.

"People coming in for the rally wouldn't necessarily know how volatile our situation was," Rieman said. "It was going to be very important to get them to take steps to help protect our area. That's why we picked a motorcycle that would get people's attention. We were hoping to get people to stop, read the message, and think."

Ideas then started to fly among the team on how to tie in the other key elements of the theme—fire, prevention and the Black Hills—and on what the final product would be.

Suddenly, it became clear that one more important component was needed: someone to take the picture. It was no small task. This image would be seen all around the Hills. It would be "the face" of the rally fire-prevention campaign.

It didn't take long to find a solution. Sturgis volunteer firefighters Maury LaRue and Tom Monahan happened to be professional photographers and owners of T&M Photographic Studio in Sturgis. They were eager to help.

"As professional photographers, we thought we could create a good image," said LaRue. "As professional firefighters, it was our calling to do this."

At the same time, Rotroff enlisted the help and support of the Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce. The chamber got on board immediately, offering financial support and free use of the official rally logo, which the chamber owns and normally charges a licensing fee to use.

Creating an image

By the next afternoon, the key elements of the image had been chosen and the photo shoot was under way. The final grouping featured the 2003 Harley, representing the rally; a Sturgis firefighter, representing the fire element; and Smokey Bear, universal symbol of fire prevention—all set against a scenic Black Hills backdrop.

By now, it also had been decided that the image would become a four-color poster. So the team enlisted the help of Jackie Twiss, a graphic artist on staff with the Black Hills National Forest, who quickly pulled together a design.

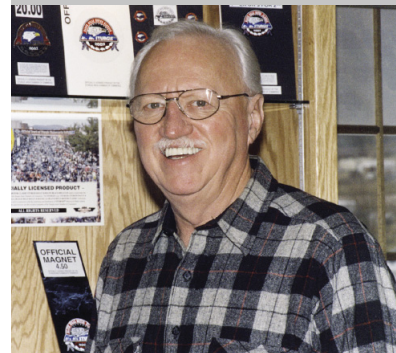
Now to find a printer, especially one who would be willing to pay for production and could provide a quick turnaround. The week-long rally was already two days old.

Rieman recommended Fenske Media Corporation, a commercial printing company in Rapid City that had done some work for the dealership and had very high-tech capabilities. So Rotroff went hunting again. And again, the answer was an emphatic “yes.”

Getting ahead of disaster

Dave Fenske, president of the family-owned business, has seen the devastation disasters can cause. The printing company has designed and produced books for clients in several states chronicling the effects of floods, tornadoes and wildfires.

“The rally is a big function of the Hills,” said Fenske, one of four brothers who own the company. “We were all very aware of the fire situation that was going on here this summer. We want to preserve the forest around



Paul Minor, executive director of the Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce



The photo shoot

Don't Burn The Rally!



T&M Photography
LaRue Monahan

REMEMBER Only you...



The finished poster

us and be proactive. And this poster was an opportunity for us to get involved this time ahead of a disaster.”

Two team members and Twiss met with Fenske graphics staff to put the finishing touches on the poster design.

Just two hours later, a proof copy of the poster was ready. By the next morning, 500 of the final version were already printed and out the door. Another 1,000 posters soon followed.

Within hours, the posters were being put up in businesses and public gathering places throughout the Black Hills. The reception was overwhelmingly positive.

“Every business I went into was supportive,” said Paul Minor, executive director

of the Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce, who helped with distribution. “In fact, I had businesses making room in their windows and moving other posters to put this one up. People on the streets were even hitting me up for copies.”

The results were positive too. Fire and forestry officials reported no major human-caused fires during the rally. Credit was given to the team’s public fire-prevention education campaign, of which the poster was a major element.

From conception to production, the poster came to life in a scant 3½ days, Retroff said, largely because of the strong public-private partnership that came together in the name of fire prevention.

“This poster demonstrates how communities can get together to accomplish a common goal,” Retroff added. “Without the cooperation of all our partners, especially the businesses, we couldn’t have done this.”

The estimated \$10,000 cost was underwritten financially and through in-kind services by Black Hills Harley-Davidson, T&M Photographic Studio, Fenske Media Corporation, Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce and the South Dakota Interagency Fire Council, a consortium of fire, forestry and land management agencies.

It was an effort that all partners said they would do again if the need is there.

“This is a story of how fires can be avoided because a dime spent on prevention can save a dollar in cost,” said Dave Fenske. “We appreciated the team’s efforts of getting ahead of the fires and we were proud to be a part of it.”

Minor agreed. “The poster was really successful. It definitely caught people’s attention. In fact, it actually became a collector’s item. By the end of the rally, they had virtually disappeared.

“But then,” he added, “with Smokey Bear, the firefighter, the motorcycle and the Black Hills in the background, how can you forget a message like that?” ■