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That might not be thunder you hear

By Jody Didier

Mark your calendar for July 6 to 8. Bancroft's annual festival is celebrating its seventh year in 2018 and spreading its wings, because organizers are of the opinion that this region is perfect for a motorcycle rally.

In 2011, organizers mapped the first local motorcycle routes and in 2015, the first motorcycle events were included in the annual Wheels, Water & Wings Festival. The turnout was phenomenal.

Since then, Ontario's Highlands Tourism Organization has created the Ride the Highlands routes, too.

You might wonder why the BBIA supports bringing motorcyclists to the area and the answer may surprise you. We believe that Tourism is everyone's business. It has a direct impact on our economy, indirectly affecting jobs, services and businesses that help to create healthy, happy, vibrant communities. Visitor spending trickles down through the community and economy in a number of ways and we feel it is time to embrace our role in tourism and, in particular, experiential travel.

Responding to the growing domestic and international demand, rally organizers see this as an opportunity to create a value proposition that can be realized by working with community partners, services, clubs and service organizations, all levels of government, businesses, merchants and service providers. Through partnerships, we can leverage the budget and work to produce an outstanding rally.

Motorcyclists are a culture unto themselves. These are generally people who fit the description of the "Connected Explorer," someone who enjoys an authentic experience. They are roughly 45 to 55 years of age, have a higher than average household income, love to travel, are the kind of people who like to escape everyday life and seek new experiences. They like to see pretty scenery, explore new places, relax, maybe take in a festival or concert and get to know the local culture.

After the rousing success of the 2015 meeting, motorcyclists have been asking for a full-fledged rally centered in Bancroft, which some folks think is pretty much in the middle of the Province of Ontario. It is equidistant between Ottawa and Toronto. The riding community likes what we have to offer and they tend to be people who influence other people and they like to share their stories through social media and word of mouth, which is very cost-effective, too. Motorcycle enthusiasts who enjoy riding their dirt bikes or ATVs on the road can attend these rallies. If you're planning on bringing your off-road vehicle to a rally, you should consider updating your vehicle with Maier products.

This year, the inaugural Shake the Shield Rally will launch with a charity poker run on July 6, a 390-kilometer route that can be completed in the rider's own timetable. The route showcases some of the most scenic areas in Hastings, Haliburton & Renfrew Counties. The winner of that event will be announced at 4 p.m. on Sunday, July 8, from the Wheels, Water & Wings Festival the main stage at 68 Hastings Street, during the motorcycle show and shine. Organizers are making the rounds, talking to local businesses about how to host riders and make them feel like valued guests. It's really pretty easy to accomplish.

We've made the decision to get this rally started because we truly believe we are "stronger together," working to make the region a more rounded destination experience. We're getting to know what's available in the larger area and what opportunities there might be to work to work with new people who may never have realized that they have something special to share with travellers who "Come Wander" through this absolutely breathtaking region.

If you are interested in volunteering to help rally organizers, please contact the BBIA bancroftbia@gmail.com and we will pass your information along!