

JUNE 28 | 2011

YOUR
COMMUNITY
VOICE™

CASEY WEEKLY

BERWICK



ROLL OUT

Riding to honour
road's silent victims

DAMP SPIRITS

Floods still felt
four months on

Fairfax Media

incorporating
Berwick & District
Journal

caseyweeklyberwick.com.au

RECOVERY RIDE

SES volunteers are bringing attention to those left behind by road accidents. Cameron Lucadou-Wells reports.

Photograph by Ted Kloszynski

For Pakenham SES volunteer Peter Morrison-Dowd, restlessness had been building for some time. He has attended more than 250 road rescues, and seen horrific things.

"I was tired of just cutting dead people out of cars," Mr Morrison-Dowd said.

"Although I do about 80-90 per cent of road rescues in the area, I felt I was not doing enough."

The crunch came at a fatal at Guys Hill involving a 19-year-old woman.

It was a Mother's Day and Mr Morrison-Dowd realised the victim's mother would be reminded of her loss every year.

In need of an outlet, he turned to the Journey Beyond Road Trauma website, a national forum of personal stories.

Some were told by the loved ones left behind, enduring an unspeakable grief for the rest of their lives. Others were stories from crash survivors, who live with serious injury, or from drivers haunted by the guilt of killing somebody.

As he shared his story, Mr Morrison-Dowd was reassured by one of the 'silent victims', who emailed him: "You mightn't think you're making a difference but you are."

It was the affirmation he needed and he decided to organise a charity motorbike trek in October of almost 4000 kilometres from Pakenham to Queensland and back.

Ride Beyond the Trauma will be a nine-day odyssey selling road safety messages at secondary schools by day and hearing the stories of 'silent victims' by night.

The event will raise funds for Journey Beyond Road Trauma and other road trauma support groups.

Mr Morrison-Dowd will be joined by four SES colleagues, including road-rescuer Shayne Honey on his first long-range motorbike ride.

Mr Honey, who has seen his share of road carnage, told Mr Morrison-Dowd "you're not going without me".

Support crew members are school administrator Dianne Mason, teacher David Ellison and counsellor Isa King who will conduct presentations at towns on the way, and with trauma victims.

The group will cruise the Pacific and Newell highways, Australia's most notorious killer roads, and end the trip at Toowoomba.

The send-off from Pakenham on October 9 is expected to attract an accompanying mass of riders.

More than 30 motorcycle clubs across Australia have stated they will hold rides to coincide with the send-off. The journey may also be filmed for TV.

In the 12 months to April 2011, 296 people were killed on Victorian roads — 20 in Casey-Cardinia.

A further 226 accident victims on Casey roads were admitted to hospital, 74 in Cardinia.



Peter Morrison-Dowd

But Journey Beyond Road Trauma's South Australian co-founder Sandra Cook said there was a hidden toll of loved ones left behind.

She said they shared a kind of isolation, and many needed to be heard.

Ms Cook felt the vacuum of support seven years ago when she lost her father, killed in a head-on smash with a driver who had crossed onto the wrong side of the road.

"Road trauma isn't sexy. [At the time] when I was Googling for a support group, I couldn't find one but I could find one for people who had lost their pets."

In 2008, she and screen producer-writer Kerry Sunderland established the website as a "sanctuary".

Since then, 2000 people have signed up and relayed their stories of loss — some tell stories publicly, some in a private blog; some relate a fatality from 20 years ago, others from a few days ago.

A forum on the site allows them to connect with others who understand their devastation. A number of heart-felt testimonials refer to the website as a lifeline.

Ms Cook looks forward to Ride Beyond the Trauma and to elevating the cause to a national stage.

"It's amazing someone like Peter has been touched on a personal level to go on to do something like this."

Mr Morrison-Dowd and Mr Honey said they avoided some crash sites they attended as road rescuers for months because of bad memories.

Mr Morrison-Dowd remembered when he couldn't keep a crashed motorcyclist alive in Lang Lang. The rider, wearing just a T-shirt, shorts and helmet, had hit a tree.

He gave the rider CPR for half-an-hour, but couldn't give him

mouth-to-mouth because the alcohol was so strong on the rider's breath.

"That knocked me for six," he said. "It was my first full-on fatality. I kept asking myself did I do it right."

Mr Honey said neither minded taking a call to counsel colleagues in the early hours of morning "because we've all been through it".

"They are not things you want to see every day," he said.

Given what they have seen, the pair are stunned when they witness reckless drivers.

Mr Morrison-Dowd was almost collected by an 84-year-old man who pulled out in front of him at an intersection. In avoiding the contact, Mr Morrison-Dowd fell in the middle of the road with a broken wrist, knees and ankle.

A second car came to a screeching stop a metre from his sprawling body.

"People give motorbike riders a lot of grief but we have to ride defensively all the time."

"If we get hit, we're the ones who get hurt. You hit gravel on the road and if your front wheel wavers down, it doesn't matter how good a rider you are."

He worries about his son, turning 17 and about to get his L-plates. His ultimate nightmare would be to cut his son out of a car.

"We just want people to think about it," he said.

The Ride is seeking corporate sponsors. To help, call Shayne Honey on 0432 164 679 or Peter Morrison-Dowd on 0417 856 083.

People are invited to 'like' The Ride's facebook page at facebook.com/ridebeyondthetrauma or follow them on twitter @RideBeyonTrauma

Link: journeybeyondroadtrauma.org