

# Woman, 70, motorcycles for cause



Martha Mazzei, 70, from Myakka City, will drive her Royal Star motorcycle on a 4 -month tour to raise money for breast cancer awareness. JESSICA KLIPA  
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Martha Mazzei wasn't born to be wild.

But the 70-year-old breast cancer survivor is taking a message of hope to the streets for women during a four-month motorcycle tour.

Mazzei, who began riding with her late husband more than 20 years ago, had always made it her job to defy the stereotype often associated with motorcyclists.

She found it particularly difficult to sway her mother, who she said could only picture the rough-crowd image.

"We used to tell her we were going on vacation. We just didn't tell her what vehicle we were taking," she said.

Since then, some things have changed, including her message to women about the importance of yearly breast screenings. Mazzei, who was diagnosed with breast cancer one year ago, knew she had a heightened chance of getting the disease because her mother was diagnosed with it at age 59.

"That's why I always got mine every year because I knew one year it was going to show up," she said. "I feel like my life was saved by doing it, and this is my way to repay it."

In April, Mazzei plans to travel 8,000 miles across the United States aboard her 1996 Yamaha Royal Star, which she has nicknamed the "Vagabond Granny."

She will be visiting motorcycle rallies to speak to women. Her first stop will be at the United Breast Cancer Foundation in New York to pick up educational pamphlets and brochures.

"I want to get this information out to people so they have an option," she said. "You really can't afford not to do it. If I can convince a few people, it will be worthwhile."

The cost for the trip, including gas, food and lodging, is funded by a grant from the foundation.

The United Breast Cancer Foundation gives individual grants to breast cancer survivors or those who have been affected by breast cancer by providing money to help pay for medical bills, an automobile, college scholarships, counseling and other needs, said Beth Heim, director of operations for the United Breast Cancer Foundation.

Mazzei's request to go on the tour was unique, but she gained the support of the foundation, Heim said.

"We just think that Martha is quite an ambitious woman to take this on," she said. "More people like Martha should be out there."

Jo Marble, a Palmetto resident who has known Mazzei for about 10 years, admires her for passing on the gift of life to other women.

"She would have done this even if she hadn't gotten any funding at all, because she believes in this," Marble said.

Like Marble, Cheryl Maddox is amazed at the strength and energy Mazzei possesses. Nicknamed "Mopey" after the country outpost store Mazzei used to own with her husband in Myakka, Mazzei is known around town for riding with the other motorcyclists in the Myakka Christmas Parade

"I think it's great," Maddox said. "She's something else how she goes around on that three-wheeler."

Maddox, though, is worried about Mazzei and plans on keeping in touch with her by cell phone.

But Mazzei, who is traveling alone, is an experienced rider after spending those years with her husband. She plans on dropping in places she would have liked to have seen, but never got the chance to see because her husband always was intent on getting from one place to the next.

After he died in 2000, she realized how much she missed riding and the people she met along the way.

"Some people, when they get to be my age, start to shut down, but there is so much in the U.S. to see and do," she said.

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