

Beverly bike race provides a boost for downtown

BY ETHAN FORMAN STAFF WRITER | Posted: Monday, July 27, 2015 8:34 pm

BEVERLY — On Wednesday, metal barricades festooned with sponsorship banners will appear along a bicycle race course on Cabot Street.

Amid team cars and pup tents, the mechanics will be busy making last minute adjustments to the high-end road bikes. Teams of riders will shoot the breeze before they line up for the start on Cabot Street.

And while bikers are racing, downtown Beverly will be bustling.

“Anything to promote cycling and the cultural diversity of downtown Beverly is a good thing,” said Richard Darrah, one of the owners of the family-owned Browns of Beverly Bicycles at 278 Cabot St.

Last year’s Gran Prix of Beverly bicycle race attracted hundreds of spectators along Cabot Street on what would normally be a sleepy Wednesday night in July. They came out to watch packs of top professionals and amateur bike racers attack one another on a challenging, twisting criterium course.

This year’s race, renamed Windover Construction Gran Prix of Beverly presented by Porsche of Danvers, is a top cycling event in New England, drawing top men’s and women’s racers from all over. It’s the men’s and women’s state criterium championships.

The race is now in its seventh year, and Race Director Paul Boudreau says the audience lining the 0.6-mile course around the downtown gets bigger each year, both among cycling enthusiasts and general spectators.

“It’s turned out to be something fun -- the community embraced it,” Boudreau said.

Kevin Harutunian, chief of staff for Beverly Mayor Michael Cahill, called the Gran Prix “a great attraction for our city and our downtown.”



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File photoBeverly: Riders in the Gran Prix of Beverly start the race in front of Soma restaurant in 2013. The bike race, going off Wednesday, has become a popular downtown attraction.

Windover Construction, a new title sponsor, recently moved its headquarters from Manchester-by-the-Sea to Beverly embraced this community event.

“We find our community involvement to be a true differentiator for our employees,” said Lee Dellicker, Windover Construction’s president and CEO, in a prepared statement. “They feel energized by their investment in others.”

Sponsors are important, Boudreau said, because even though 200 racers take part, their entry fees do not cover costs for police details and barricades, among other things. The fencing alone costs \$4,500.

“It’s a lot of money to put the event on,” Boudreau said.

Boudreau, the president of the host cycling club, Essex County Velo, said one of the goals of the Gran Prix was to make a positive impact on the downtown.

Boudreau, a bike racer himself who also organizes the internationally known cyclocross race, the Gran Prix of Gloucester, got to know professional bike racer Tim Johnson, a six-time U.S. National Cyclocross champion. Johnson hatched the idea of a bike race in Beverly, and came up with the hair-raising course around the downtown. Boudreau worked with downtown businesses owners to get their input.

Boudreau said proponents batted around which day of the week would be best to hold the race. While a lot of cycling events are held on weekends, Wednesdays tend to be slow for restaurants, making it a perfect time to bring 200 racers and their supporters downtown, without interfering with weekend business.

Several eateries sit directly on Cabot Street between Hale and Winter streets along the course.

“The people on the course — the restaurants and bars — they love it,” Boudreau said.

John Mahoney, an owner of the Atomic Cafe, said his business goes up about 20 percent during the race.

“Events like the Gran Prix are great for the downtown,” Mahoney said. Not only do locals come out to support the race, but so do people from out of town. Atomic Cafe recently got a beer and wine license from the city, and it intends to start pouring the day of the race.

“We are getting that going just for the race,” Mahoney said.

Don MacQuarrie, now a retired vice president at Beverly Bank, acts as the liaison between the Gran Prix and the city, said the date was set on the Wednesday preceding Beverly Homecoming to also tie it in with that event.

“The restaurants get a boost, and that was the intent of it to use the downtown,” MacQuarrie said.

The Gran Prix of Beverly may also benefit by being the only major bike race on the North Shore this summer.

The other major event, the Witches Cup, normally staged in August, is taking a one-year hiatus due to ongoing road construction on the course by Salem Common and the Hawthorne Hotel.

“It’s one of the only races that are still going on, so I think it will get a boost this year,” said Dan Shuman, the owner of Salem Cycle, 72 Washington St., in Salem, and one of the organizers of the Witches Cup.

Shuman said downtown Salem businesses loved the Witches Cup, as it filled restaurants and got people downtown. He and other organizers plans to run the race again in 2016.

Back in Beverly, those who work at the Centraal Cycle bike shop at 237 Cabot St. have a front-row seat to the Gran Prix, which zooms past its front door.

Employee Evan Scheiner said the shop has a small party and stays open later than normal. While the race may not translate directly into bike sales, Scheiner says there’s a potential for such sales down the road.

“It gets people interested in riding bikes, and it gets kids interested in racing later on,” Scheiner said.

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If you go

What: The Seventh Annual Gran Prix of Beverly

When: 4 to 8 p.m., July 29

Where: Downtown Beverly; downtown portions of Hale, Cabot, Winter, Essex and Dane streets will be blocked off for the course

Who: Top professional and amateur bike racers from New England, the United State and Canada.

Events: Men's and women's state criterium championships, masters men and amateur men's races; kids race and parade.