

## Bone marrow biking rally Saturday

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By TOM McCOAG Amherst Bureau | 4:41 AM



Fred and Debbie Chase, of Fenwick, will be riding their Harley-Davidson in the Biking 4 Bone Marrow rally Saturday in Amherst.

FENWICK — July 29 is not a day that will live in infamy, but the date does mean a lot to Debbie Chase and Dave Arsenault.

"It's the day we both got our bone marrow transplants," Ms. Chase, of Fenwick, said Tuesday.

"Yeah, we had them exactly a year apart," Mr. Arsenault interjects. "She had hers in 2004, and I had mine in 2005."

July 19 is also the day in 2006 of the first-ever Biking 4 Bone Marrow motorcycle rally to raise funds for the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre's bone marrow transplant unit.

Organized by the two friends, along with Ms. Chase's husband Fred and their friend Chris Newman, another bone-marrow transplant recipient, it was held last summer. It attracted more than 100 bikers and raised \$15,000.

The four are planning it again, but due to work commitments this year's event has to be held this Saturday. They hope to raise as much money or more than they did last year.

"We did the first one and we're doing the one this year as a way to say thank you to the unit that saved our lives," Mr. Arsenault said. "The care they gave us was just phenomenal."

The other two recipients nodded in agreement.

"The transplant gave me a new lease on life," said Ms. Chase, who needed the procedure after being diagnosed with lymphoma. "It gave me a chance to start all over again. I was

lucky because didn't have to wait a long time before they found a donor who was a perfect match for me."

Mr. Arsenault wasn't as lucky.

After being diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndromes, a disease that destroys bone marrow, he was told that despite a worldwide search there was no match for him. For the next two years he was given repeated blood transfusions to keep him alive.

"If a donor hadn't been found when they did finally find one, I probably wouldn't be here now," he said.

Mr. Newman's quality of life was also at a low ebb when he was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a disease that destroys blood cells and prevents oxygen distribution throughout the body.

"I used to live flat-out working, snowmobiling, flying, but when I got the disease my life slowed down to a crawl," he said. "I couldn't even make it up the stairs. I had to have two blood marrow transplants, because the first one didn't take."

All three said their lives now are back to normal.

"I told Fred that if I survived he'd better get a motorcycle for the two of us," Ms. Chase said. "We'd always wanted a motorbike but never got around to having one. I figured it was about time we had one."

After they got their motorcycle, they persuaded Mr. Arsenault to get one. They didn't convince Mr. Newman (he flies), but all four thought a bike rally would be the way they could help those who had helped them.

The money they raise through the rally as well as tickets on a motorcycle and a barbecue will be used for nurses' training, research and assistance for patients and their families.

"We're also hoping the ride will increase the awareness out there that there is a great need for bone-marrow transplant donors," Mr. Arsenault said.

Biking 4 Bone Marrow gets underway at Harrison's Home Hardware (off Exit 4 of Highway 104 in Amherst). The course runs from Amherst to Southampton, Parrsboro and the Advocate area and back to Amherst.

For more information, call Fred and Debbie Chase at 667-7634 or the QEII Foundation at 473-3325 (or check out [biking4bonemarrow.com](http://biking4bonemarrow.com)).

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