

Red Devils keep quiet on Poker Run route

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The Red Devils Motorcycle Club is keeping the route for its controversial Poker Run secret.

It will hold its annual Poker Run next month and expects a good turnout for the event.

Nelson police say they are "acutely aware" that the Poker Run is planned for March 9 and are promising to police it hard.

The event is associated with the Red Devils whose members started it in 2002, seven years before the club was formed in 2009.

The club's lawyer, Steve Rollo, said the run was a fundraiser event and was open to the public with riders on any make or model of motorcycle, or hot rod welcome.

Patched gang members from out of town are expected on the ride.

"It's attended by patched members and Joe Public," Mr Rollo said.

A club spokesman said the route of the run would not be publicised this year.

"Unfortunately we have to keep the route and the stops secret or the police visit the licensees and pressure them to refuse us entry," he said.

He said they had previously told police the route thinking police would help them out with road safety as they had in other parts of the country.

"But instead they used that information to bully licensees into refusing us entry."

Police last year were forced to drop charges against 21 people caught in an undercover police operation targeting the Red Devils.

Justice Simon France ruled the police abused the court process through deceiving a court over the arrest of an undercover police officer.

The charges the group faced related to drugs and firearms. Ten people were charged with taking part in an organised criminal group.

Justice France's decision has been appealed by the Crown and the appeal has been set down for the middle of the year.

Police have traditionally had a strong presence following the poker run. For the past two years numbers of riders have been low, down from a high of 300 participants.

The club spokesman expected numbers would be up on this year's ride.

"We would like to see over 100 this year which will be a good base to build it up again to what it was."

He said the event was good for businesses in Nelson as it brought in people from out of town and people spent money at the stops.

A Poker Run is a motorcycling event where participants visit pubs and cafes and collect a playing card at each stop. Prizes are awarded for the best poker hand at the end of the day.

They are held internationally with motorcycle gangs claiming they are fundraising events.

It costs \$20 to take part and as in past years Medi Max, a first aid provider, will receive a donation from money raised in the ride.

St John refused further donations from the ride a few years ago.

The spokesman said organisers were proud of the safety record on the ride and said it would be easier if police worked with them and helped with traffic control.

"But with or without them we'll be doing our best to run another safe and enjoyable event."

Mr Rollo said it was not the police's role to interfere with a lawful activity regardless of who had organised it and police needed to "tread carefully".

"They've been successfully sued in the past for abusing their powers in a similar fashion."

Nelson Bays Area Commander Inspector Steve Greally said it did not matter what the perceived motive was for staging the event was.

"When we have got motorcycle gangs coming into our patch we will be all across it, simple as that. We will not be assisting them with traffic control, but we will be amongst it and covering it as we would always do right across the country."

Mr Greally said police were always careful when dealing with people. However everyone on the road had to comply with road rules and his officers would deal with whoever they needed to on the roads.

"Motorcycle gangs, ethnic gangs, any sort of criminal gangs in New Zealand are not about charity. That's a guarantee, they are about criminal behaviour which is why they get and deserve the attention from police that they do get."

Spirit of competition burns brightly at event



Ready to compete: Global messengers Dale Smit of Marlborough, left, and Graeme Porter of Nelson run a lap with the Special Olympic flame at the opening ceremony for the Regional Games hosted by Special Olympics Nelson at the Saxton Athletics Complex on Saturday.

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Competitors descended on Nelson for a regional Special Olympics event, including a man who had never been outside of Christchurch before.

About 300 competitors from as far north as Manawatu and as far south as Canterbury took part in the event on Saturday and yesterday.

Special Olympics Nelson coordinator Lois Aikenhead said the opening ceremony was "brilliant", with athletes marching around the athletics oval at Saxton Field.

Athletes chosen to spread the word about the Special Olympics, called Global Messengers, took a lit Olympic flame around with them.

Nelson MP Nick Smith officially opened the event, and Nelson singer Sophie Ricketts sang the New Zealand national anthem.

John Towns, who founded Special Olympics Nelson in 1984, also gave a speech.

Ms Aikenhead said the last time Nelson hosted the regional competition was in 2002.

"We decided we'd be brave, and have the eight sports that we run here: Swimming, athletics, bocce, tenpin bowling, indoor bowls, power lifting, golf, and basketball. It was a big undertaking," she said.

There were 78 competitors from

Special Olympics Nelson, as well as others from Waimea College, Nayland College, and Motueka.

"They love it because they meet up with people from other games. They make friends from all over the place."

Ms Aikenhead said one 27-year-old man, who competed in the basketball competition, had never been out of Christchurch before.

It was a great experience for him, she said, and the event was also a great opportunity to showcase Special Olympics Nelson's new flag.

Nelson man Nigel Fearn, who has competed in every regional event since 1984, carried the flag around the oval.

"He had a sore eye, and was not allowed to compete. It was the first regional competition he had missed."

Ms Aikenhead said Special Olympics were "probably the best sportspeople I have ever met". "It's amazing. Everybody says that about the sportsmanship of Special Olympians - how special it is," she said.

Ms Aikenhead said at least 36 athletes from Special Olympics Nelson would head to nationals in Dunedin in November, as well as competitors from Waimea College, and possibly Nayland College.

Ms Aikenhead said there would be a major fundraising drive as it would cost \$1000 per competitor to get down there, compete, and return to Nelson.



Big day: Members of Special Olympics Nelson team in the grand parade during the opening ceremony.

Doctor uses stem cells to treat disease, injury

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An experimental stem cell treatment for joint and tendon regeneration is being offered in Richmond.

Doctor Robert DeBoyer, is providing the treatment where a patient's own stem cells are used to treat disease or injury.

The treatment can be controversial as it is still largely experimental.

Dr DeBoyer, who runs Stem-Cell NZ with his wife, Rhona, has been offering the treatment in New Zealand for six months from the Lower Queen St medical centre in Richmond, and in Wellington.

He said it had about an 80 per cent efficacy rate and could provide relief for some patients that meant they did not need surgery.

The treatment involved extracting 30-60ml of blood from a patient and putting it through a "highly sophisticated" centrifuge.

Dr DeBoyer said a rich plasma, containing about 170,000 stem cells, was obtained. It was injected into the joints or tendons, where it helped replicate new cartilage

and, over time, relieved symptoms.

He said the treatment had a 24-hour recovery time and most patients only needed one treatment. It cost about \$1400.

So far he had used it on about 60 people in the Nelson region.

While the treatment was new in New Zealand, Dr DeBoyer said it was a reasonably standard therapy in the United States.

"Over here I suppose it is a bit left of centre. I'm sure the odd orthopaedic surgeon would raise his eyebrows. But it is a new treatment dimension and I think regenerative medicine... has to be the way that medicine is going to go in the future."

Dr DeBoyer trained in Britain, and said he became interested in joint and tendon function while working as a registrar at the Royal London Hospital Rheumatology Unit.

Nelson general practitioners spokesman Graham Loveridge said stem cell treatment was fairly unproven.

Dr Loveridge said stem cells had the potential to have great benefits in medicine but there had not been scientific clinical



Offering hope: Robert DeBoyer and his wife, Rhona, who together run Stem-Cell NZ, offer experimental stem cell treatment.

Photo: MARION VAN DIJK/FAIRFAX NZ

trials done on the treatment.

He said stem cell treatments similar to the one that Dr DeBoyer

provided might well provide benefits to patients but he would want to see evidence of the benefits

from properly conducted clinical trials before he referred patients.

"At present I haven't seen that kind of evidence."

Blenheim resident Ronald Bell, 86, said he had the treatment from Dr DeBoyer on his left knee before Christmas.

Prior to the treatment he was finding it difficult to walk and was in constant pain. Surgeons had told him he could not have surgery because of his general health.

The treatment was simple and only took about 30 minutes, and he went home soon after receiving it.

He only needed a local anaesthetic injection into his knee.

"Three days later all the pain had gone out of my knee and I was beginning to walk comfortably. I think it's absolutely marvellous. I really do. Anyone who's got knee trouble I would say go for it."

His mobility and pain levels were markedly better.

"I've had no pain from it whatsoever and I can actually kick a ball now with the leg which is something I couldn't do before."

Dr DeBoyer told him the treatment was experimental and that not many people had had it before in New Zealand.



Under scrutiny: A police checkpoint on the Appleby Straight at a previous Red Devils Poker Run.

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