

Walk Like MADD returns to River Walk Saturday

BY KELLY ARDIS
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By Saturday, the summer weather that has lingered into fall should be on its way out, with a day in the 80s just in time for Walk Like MADD and MADD Dash. But rain or shine, or 100-degree weather, nothing would stop the folks at Mothers Against Drunk Driving from showing up.

The event returns for its fifth year on Saturday at The Park at River Walk, where participants can walk, run or just show up to support a cause that everyone can get behind.

"This cause is something that is close to people's hearts," said Jorge Barrientos, planning committee chairman. "No one can argue against (stopping drunken driving)."

The goal of Walk Like MADD, which is presented by law firm Chain Cohn Stiles, is threefold: to spread awareness of the DUI problem in Kern County, to raise funds for the educational programs that MADD Kern County puts on and to support victims and survivors whose lives have been forever changed because of drunken or drugged driving.

"It allows these victims to come together and not only demand change but



MARK NESSIA / TBC MEDIA

Kids run through the finish line at the Walk Like MADD/ MADD Rush event in The Park at River Walk in 2017.

also come together with like-minded folks who have unfortunately experienced the same tragedy," Barrientos said.

The day starts with registration at 6:30 a.m. (Last-minute planners will be happy to know they can register the day of the event.) An opening ceremony will take place at 7:30 a.m., when

MADD representatives, DUI crash victims and families and community dignitaries will take the stage to address those gathered.

The action officially begins at 8 a.m., when the 5K and 10K will start. Participants are welcome to walk or run, with top finishers receiving a medal. At the same time, there will also

be a superhero-themed fun run for kids and the victims' march, where people will have signs and photos of those who have been killed by drunken driving.

"It's kind of a bittersweet kind of thing," Barrientos said of the event. "There are, rightly, a lot of people that are angry about what happened to them, and

others, it helps them to come together (with people who understand)."

Kern County averages 11 DUI arrests a day, with California Highway Patrol having already investigated 260 crashes where driving under the influence was a primary factor in Bakersfield from January through August of this year. Nine of those crashes resulted in a fatality.

Why they are at the walk is never far from people's minds.

"It's the point of the event, why everyone's there in the first place," Barrientos said. "DUIs are a problem in our community and we need to do something about it."

More than 1,000 people are expected to show up,

WALK LIKE MADD & MADD DASH

When: 6:30 a.m. registration, 7:30 a.m. opening ceremony, 8 a.m. walk/run, Saturday

Where: Park at River Walk, 11200 Stockdale Highway.

Admission: \$20 youth, \$25 adult

Information: walklike-madd.org/bakersfield

Barrientos said. The walk/run raised more than \$80,000 last year and has already raised around \$53,000 of its \$60,000 goal for this year. Barrientos said the event would likely surpass the goal on Saturday.

Money raised from Walk Like MADD will help the nonprofit offer educational programs as well as help support victims and survivors who have to appear in court for DUI cases.

"When you have a family that experiences this kind of tragedy, life changes for them," Barrientos said.

"Some of the funds raised go toward helping them, especially in the courtroom."

Barrientos said he hopes those who go to the walk will leave with a commitment to never get behind the wheel after drinking.

"I think we all hope that people get that message and will think twice," Barrientos said. "The message isn't don't drink or don't have a good time. The message is plan ahead ... Make sure you and your loved ones get home safe."

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