

Legacy

GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA

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Showcasing classics for a cause

Fourth annual Rydell Benefit Car Show raises more than \$43,000 for Altru Cancer Center in honor of employees.

They just don't make them like they used to. Perhaps that's why Rydell Chevrolet Cadillac Buick GMC drew a crowd of about 5,000 during its fourth annual benefit car show. People came to see (and show off) a variety of classic cars and pickups, along with a smattering of new cars, rock climbers, pedal cars and motorcycles.

"The show is open to all types of vehicles, not just autos," said general manager Brian Rydell. Vehicle owners paid \$25 to \$30 (depending on registration date) to display their vehicle at the event. The event itself was free and open to the public.

Rydell continued, "This year we had 209 vehicles registered." That number is up significantly from the 144 displayed in 2008. That increase could be due to the cause the benefit car show supported this year: Altru Cancer Center.

In the last 18 months, six Rydell employees have been diagnosed with cancer and a number of other employees have had family and friends affected by the disease. Two of Rydell's employees, Brian Kristjanson and Troy Riedlinger, lost their battles with cancer shortly after diagnosis.

Kristjanson worked as a sales consultant for Rydell for seven years. He hadn't felt well for more than a year, but never complained. By the time Kristjanson sought medical attention, small cell cancer had spread throughout his body; treatment was no longer an option. "Brian was more concerned about me than about himself," said Cheryl Kristjanson, Brian's wife of 45 years. Kristjanson's children and family gathered by his side and six days after his diagnosis he passed away. "Brian was a real family man, a well liked sales consultant and a fan of auto racing," said Rydell.

For 13 years, Riedlinger worked in Rydell's parts department. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer; a month later, August 7, 2009, he lost his battle with the

disease. He was 39. "Troy was a fun person who loved to make people laugh," recalled Rydell. "And, he was a huge Fighting Sioux hockey fan."

To honor their memory and to show support for other employees fighting cancer, Rydell staff collectively selected Altru Cancer Center as the recipient of the funds raised during its fourth annual benefit car show.

A majority of the cars were local with some coming in from surrounding areas like Fargo and Winnipeg. "We hope to draw from a bigger and bigger area each year," Rydell commented.

The cancer cause was the reason John Kelley and Maurie Lamb drove their cars up from Fargo for the show. "Not only was this something for us to do on a beautiful Sunday, but we're very much in favor of cancer research and providing cancer treatment close to home," said Kelley. "Wes Rydell is a big proponent of cancer causes and we're happy to join him and the Rydell company as part of an event that supports local cancer care."

The same sentiment is shared by Ingo Keller, Harwood, N.D. Keller is a fan of the Corvette. In fact he owns five. He drove his 2008 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 up for the event. "Rydell is a class act and the one place I look to do my [automotive] business," said Keller. I support Rydell's efforts to raise money for cancer 100 percent. It's even more important that the money stays local and helps those in the community. It's a tremendous way to give back."

Rydell Chevrolet's roots started in Montgomery, Minn., in the 1940s by Leonard Rydell. At Chevrolet's request, Rydell moved to Grand Forks in 1954 to operate its dealership.

"Leonard had many strongly held business and personal philosophies that served him well," said Rydell. "These philosophies, known as 'Leonardisms', help guide our business and personal decisions still today."

Leonard sold the business to his son, Wes, in 1976. Under Wes' direction, Rydell Chevrolet converted to the one price, no hassle, no haggle policy that is followed today. As the years passed, Rydell Chevrolet added Cadillac, Oldsmobile, GMC, Pontiac, Buick and Saturn franchises to its lineup in Grand Forks.

Rydell Chevrolet expanded to Mandan, N.D., in 1980. Leonard and Wes helped one of their managers purchase a dealership there. It was their intent to assist the manager in owning the dealership outright. The plan worked and Leonard and Wes repeated the process with many other managers. Today the Rydell Group has grown to more than 60 dealerships in 11 states.

"We are truly thankful to be part of such a wonderful community that provides us our success," said Rydell. That success is not only true for the business, but of the car show as well.

"We were very pleased with the turnout and only expect it to get bigger each year," Rydell stated. "It really is a lot of fun to do this and to see all of the people enjoying themselves and having a good time. Even the kids seem to like the inflatable toys and activities. We work very hard to make this a family friendly event."

The fourth annual event raised \$21,594.79. Rydell Chevrolet Cadillac Buick GMC matched the funds generated by the event dollar for dollar. In all, the company donated \$43,189.58 to Altru Cancer Center. Proceeds will be used to support Filling the Gap, a program designed to help financially eligible Altru cancer patients with lodging, transportation and nutritional assistance. These items are not traditionally covered by insurance, yet deeply impact the quality of life for cancer patients.

"We are proud to support Altru Cancer Center and the care it provides to all of its patients," Rydell commented. "Miraculously, one of our employees who was diagnosed with cancer is now cancer free. It is truly amazing."

Rydell continued, "Without the support of the entire community, our show would not have been a success. We'd like to specifically thank the public for coming out in such huge numbers to support our cause. And we extend a special thanks to all of the participants, volunteers, employees, businesses and individuals who donated their time and talents as well as items for our silent and public auctions. This was a wonderful way to remember Brian and Troy. They will be greatly missed by us all."

Rydell Chevrolet Cadillac Buick GMC hosts its benefit car show annually on the third Sunday in September. The fifth annual event will be held Sunday, September 19, 2010, at 2700 South Washington Street. The event is scheduled to run 12 – 4 p.m.



Top: Vehicles on display during Rydell's car show were polished to an impeccable shine. Enough so that John Kelley's 1948 Chevrolet Fleetline was perfectly reflected in an adjacent car's hub cap.

Middle: The license plate on Ingo Keller's 2008 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 reads "YOULLUZ." Keller and more than 200 other exhibitors showed their vehicles to a crowd of 5000 during the fourth annual Rydell Benefit Car Show.

Bottom: Car enthusiasts enjoyed sunny weather and had a variety of classic cars and pickups to browse during Rydell's September 20 benefit car show. The event generated more than \$43,000 and was donated to Altru Cancer Center.