

THE BEAT CHICAGO

FROM DOWNTOWN AND THE CITY'S NEIGHBORHOODS

CHICAGO

Survivors tell breast cancer to hit the road

3 locals ride Harleys in trip of lifetime

After life-changing surgery and six rounds of chemotherapy, Christina Koenig is ready to get on her bike and ride.

Koenig, 43, is one of three young breast cancer survivors from Chicago selected to hit the road in "Changing Gears," an eight-day motorcycle run up the California coast. The journey begins Saturday, kick-starting Breast Cancer Awareness Month into high gear.

In all, 20 women who've faced breast cancer in their 30s and 40s will gather in San Diego for the road trip to San Francisco, stopping their Harleys along the way to talk about the special challenges of the disease for younger women. An estimated 2 million American women are living with breast cancer; 250,000 are under 45.

"Maybe you're dating, maybe you have young children," said Karen Richards, 44, of Lincoln Park. "It's just to let young women know that there's so much life to be lived after cancer."

Based on a similar ride across Australia in 1996, Changing Gears will raise funds for the Young Survival Coalition and the Chicago-based Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization, a 24-hour hot line staffed

by breast cancer survivors. Donations can be made at www.changinggears.org.

Rider Teresa Rosainz, 41, has tackled both breast and ovarian cancer and wants to raise awareness among other Hispanic women. A veteran of five triathlons, Rosainz ran her latest relay in July, three months after finishing six rounds of chemo.

"I want to show . . . that even

'It's just to let young women know that there's so much life to be lived after cancer.'

—Lincoln Park resident Karen Richards, 44, young breast cancer survivor

though we have gone through hell, you have to have the strength to pick yourself up again and do something crazy," said Rosainz, a single mom who lives on the Near North Side. "Six months ago I couldn't get out of my bed. Now my kids see me riding a motorcycle, and they think it's really cool."