

This featured appeared in the debut This Week Marysville & Dublin.



C&A founder, Carl (back, left) is now retired but his sons, Kerry and Barry, are both actively involved in the family business, Photos By Adam Cairns/ThisWeek.

'Biker chic'

Joining the boys club

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Women are on the front line in what traditionally has been a man's business at C&A Harley Davidson near Plain City. Dena Besece, left, is general manager of the dealership and her mother, Adonna, is a principal owner.

Women are on the front line in what traditionally has been a man's business at C&A Harley Davidson near Plain City. Dena Besece, left, is general manager of the dealership and her mother, Adonna, is a principal owner. C&S founder, Carl (back, left) is now retired but his sons, Kerry and Barry, are both actively involved in the family business. It wasn't all that long ago that a woman's place was on the back of a Harley Davidson motorcycle and her function was strictly decorative.

However, the "biker chick" stereotype has been replaced by "biker chic" as women have moved not only to the front of the bike, but to the front of their own bikes.

Not only are women purchasing motorcycles in record numbers, in the case of C&A Harley Davidson near Plain City, they are buying the bikes -- from other women. Women not only make up a third of the C&A workforce, they own and manage the business.

When founder Carl Besece retired from the family business in 2001, he handed the reins over to his wife and co-owner Adonna and their daughter Dena, who now serves as general manager. While sons Barry (accounting) and Kerry (parts manager) are also actively involved, the women in the Besece family aren't taking a back seat to anyone.

Carl, a long-time Harley rider, still participates in frequent rides with C&A customers and local Hog Club members, but Adonna is officially in charge of the business now.

"A lot of women ride with their spouse or significant other," Dena Besece said. "But just in the past five years, that has changed and women have moved to the front of the bike."

While approximately 10 percent of Harley Davidson owners are women, female riders account for 15 percent of C&A's sales. Barry Besece estimated that over the past four years, C&A has sold 40 to 50 motorcycles a year to women.

"We're higher than the national average and I think that has a lot to do with the fact that we have a lot of women who work in the dealership," Dena Besece said. "Women are more comfortable coming into our dealership knowing that. It is a male dominated sport and it is intimidating for a

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female to come into a dealership with all men. I really think it helps that we have women working here."

She said targeting women is good business.

"Women control 80 percent of the purse strings," she said. "So even if the boyfriend is buying the bike, the woman's opinion is going to weigh heavily on the decision."

C&A's inventory of motorcycles ranges in price from about \$6,300 to more than \$32,000 with the average sale price being close to \$18,000.

But there's more to the business than motorcycles, including helmets, caps, T-shirts, gloves, leather jackets and a wide variety of Harley Davidson-branded merchandise and accessories.

"We have a lot of women who come in and shop our clothing line," she said. "We probably sell more women's fashion clothing than we do men's."

C&A began a new motorcycle safety course this spring, and so far the classes have been at least 50 percent female.

The dealership also hosts after-hours garage parties for women only.

"It allows women to come in, venture around the store and become more comfortable," she said. "We usually get 50 to 75 women for them."

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