

Omaha Bike Week co-founder killed in drunk driving crash; community mourns during his own event

Written by Brenna Kiefner

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - Ryan Hay, co-founder of Omaha Bike Week, was killed early Thursday morning after a driver police say had a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit struck his motorcycle.

Police say Bailey Burr, 31, of Omaha, ran a left turn on 144th Street and drove directly into Hay's path. Hay was ejected from his motorcycle and transported to a hospital, where he was later pronounced dead. Burr now faces motor vehicle homicide and DUI charges.

Hay and co-founder Michael Allen launched Omaha Bike Week in 2024 with a Facebook post inviting riders to come together and celebrate. The event went viral.

"He loves motorcycles, soul life...he hit me up, said 'I gotta be part of this expansion, you need me.' And I did. We worked really good together," Allen said.

Those who knew Hay described him as someone who showed up consistently for the people around him. Derek Slechta of Stocks and Bonds, where Hay was a regular for four years, remembered him as a pillar of the community.

"If you needed it and he had it, he would give it to you. And if he didn't have it, he'd find a way to help. He was there for his community — an epitome of what you want in your community," Slechta said.

Hay's death comes in the middle of Omaha Bike Week. His motorcycle, freshly detailed, was placed outside the venue as a tribute. Proceeds from the event's raffle, T-shirt sales, and poker run are being directed to his family.

Allen said the week's remaining events — including a car night and a Saturday car show — are being held in Hay's memory.

"He was a huge car and motorcycle guy...we are having a car night and Saturday we're going to have a car show as well. But everything here, all these events, is in memory of Ryan," Allen said.

Hay's death is the latest in a string of deadly drunk driving crashes in Omaha this month. Chris Wagner, executive director of Project Extra Mile, said the toll of alcohol-related crashes in Nebraska extends well beyond high-profile cases.

"We have nearly 70 Nebraskans every year die from alcohol-related crashes. They don't all make the headlines — but that's a lot of lives that can be saved if policymakers have the wherewithal to stand up and pass what we know works," Wagner said.

Omaha Bike Week runs through next Saturday and is open daily at 11 a.m.