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American Chopper reveals unique cycle

Popular reality show films episode in SLP

JARED HUIZENGA • SUN NEWSPAPERS

The '57 Chevy bike, built by Orange County Choppers, was unveiled during an event held in St. Louis Park on Oct. 6. The unveiling raised nearly $20,000 for Smile Network.

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A one-of-a-kind vehicle unveiled in St. Louis Park has all the gadgets and look of a 1957 Chevy – but with only two wheels.

With a real, bright red '57 Chevy in the background, Paul Teutul, Sr., pulled a cloth off what he said took his Orange County Choppers longer to build than any other motorcycle the stars of TLC's "American Chopper" have put together.

"This is probably the most huge project we've done," Teutul said at a show taping Oct. 6 at Schussler Creative Laboratory along Highway 7 in St. Louis Park. "This bike has everything a '57 has on it."

To prove his point, he popped a trunk on the motorcycle and pointed to the contraption's Chevy hubcaps. While some people have made motorcycles resembling '57 Chevys in the past, they used fiberglass and the Orange County Choppers used steel.

In well over 100 shows, the crew has built a lot of bikes, but none with as much fabrication as the motorcycle unveiled in St. Louis Park.

The idea for this particular chopper came through working with Schussler Creative founder and CEO Steve Schussler, Teutul said in an interview.

Schussler's Golden Valley-based firm, which designed the Rainforest Cafe and many other restaurants, is now developing a concept for the Orange County Choppers America's RoadHouse. The restaurant will feature bikes, blues, burgers and barbecue and is expected to open at such locations as the Mall of America in Bloomington, Las Vegas, DisneyWorld and in the New Jersey Meadowlands.

The bike unveiled in St. Louis Park did not start off as a '57 Chevy, Teutul said. The

CHOPPER: TO PAGE 22A

Chopper

FROM PAGE 1A

crew even considered a motorcycle that looked like a giraffe.

"There was probably four or five conceptions that really sucked and the final one was this, which was I think the best choice," Teutul said.

The idea came from an old business card depicting Schussler's '57 Chevy, which turned into the feature background for the unveiling. Teutul said both he and Schussler collect cars.

"How cool is it that they created a '57 bike that's standing next to a '57 convertible," said an excited Schussler. "That's pretty cool."

The motorcycle took three and a half weeks to build instead of the usual bike-a-week output of the Orange County Choppers, Teutul said.

He said he enjoyed the trip to Minnesota.

"Most places we go, people are pretty starstruck by us," he said. "There's a big fan base. A lot of times they're just regular people, just like us."

The event will show St. Louis Park, where Schussler has lived for 27 years, off to viewers.

"It's a great place to live and a great way to show the world, with the unveiling of this bike during one of their episodes, what a cool place it is to live," Schussler said.

He did not know when the episode will air.

Through the event, donors who pledged $500 or more to the Smile Network charity could pose for a picture with Teutul and fellow show star Mikey Teutul. The effort raised about $20,000, Schussler said. The money is enough to pay for reconstruction surgery for 40 faces.

"That's really unbelievable," Schussler said. "That's exciting. I love giving back. Life has been good to me and my team."

He credited much of the success in raising funds for the Smile Network to the renown of the Orange County Choppers.

"It's really cool that a family building bikes has attracted so much international attention and attracted donations to charitable causes like Smile Network," Schussler said. "We think that's, as Paul, Sr., would say, off the hook."

JARED HUIZENGA • SUN NEWSPAPERS

Steve Schussler, CEO of Schussler Creative Inc., participates in the taping of an American Chopper episode about a custom chopper based on his 1957 Chevy convertible during a ceremony Oct. 6 in St. Louis Park.