Amgen’s a boon, headache for Cabrillo

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APTO - Large crowds, thousands of fans cheering from the sidelines, racers dressed in sleek attire, the late-afternoon sunlight gleaming off their helmets, barrel toward the finish line — all of it captured in the international media’s eye.

Sgt. Joe Clark’s worked with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Office for 19 years and was recently assigned to Cabrillo College. To his knowledge, Monday’s Amgen Tour of California race, expected to draw up to 10,000 fans, is the largest event to occur at the campus.

“It’s kind of like getting a Super Bowl commercial for free,” said Kristin Fabos, Cabrillo’s director of marketing and communications.

Monday, 144 racers will take off from San Francisco, biking 117 miles down the coast in Stage 2 of the eight-day race. They’re scheduled to reach the finish line on the Apts campus around 3:55 p.m., but whether that’s a good or bad thing depends on who you ask.

Cabrillo will receive no financial compensation for the hassles involved in “hosting” the finish line — including the multiple road and parking lot closures that have prompted some instructors to cancel classes that day.

But for administrators, the headaches are more than offset by the national and international exposure, including live coverage by the NBC Sports Network — meaning the campus will be showcased to millions.

“Cabrillo likes to think of itself as a community college, and since we’re in the middle of the county, it’s kind of a service to Santa Cruz County as well,” Fabos said.

But with finals week just around the corner, that’s little consolation to those students who primarily view the race as a disruption to their studies.

“As much as I think bike racing and the bike culture may be important, I think my education is more important,” student Ann Pike wrote in an email.

For Pike and others, the road and parking lot closures have left them wondering how they’ll be able to get to work on time and attend their classes.

Cabrillo itself will remain open, but Pike said she’s heard some instructors are avoiding the hassle by canceling classes. Her 6 p.m. class is moving forward as planned, but the instructor has to arrive on campus earlier than usual to get a parking space for his morning class, meaning he’ll be “very tired and less on his game by the time our class rolls around,” she wrote.

“I have to work at my second job early in the afternoon, so I also plan to come very, very early and just have to live with the parking situation,” she added.

“No, repeat, no parking provisions have been made for students,” she wrote.

But Fabos says only three of the six parking lots on the lower campus will be closed, and all of the upper parking lots are available. Students, faculty and staff have been advised — through an e-newsletter sent out last month, and even a postcard mailing sent by Amgen organizers — about driving and parking issues related to the race.

But student Ian Heath apparently missed them, saying he’s just recently heard about the closures, and only then from other students and instructors. Meanwhile, a test he was supposed to take that day had to be rescheduled, and he’s heard of instructors having to develop alternative assignments that would have required students to drive.

“Why end on a Monday instead of a day when classes aren’t in session?” he asked.

But the decision to host the second-day finish of the 750-mile race in Santa Cruz County was reached in November, and specifically at Cabrillo in February. Despite what students say, Fabos says, administrators have spent the ensuing months working out the logistics and trying to accommodate the students, faculty and staff, all as rumors continue to swirl.

“We’re leaving the pedestrian footbridge open, especially when Soquel Drive is closed, so students can get from one side of the campus to the other,” she said.

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Cars, bikes and pedestrians pass through the intersection of Cabrillo College Drive and Soquel Drive at Cabrillo College Wednesday. The busy intersection will be closed for the Amgen Tour of California stage finish on Monday, angering a number of students ahead of finals week.

Cabrillo student Ian Heath stands over a section of Soquel Drive to be closed for the stage finish of the AMGEN Tour of California Monday as he expresses his displeasure with the college's handling of the race Wednesday.

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