

Motorcycle, auto show to aid LI homeless vets draws a crowd

July 24, 2016 By Jean-Paul Salamanca jeanpaul.salamanca@newsday.com



Army veteran Joe Tumminia, left, of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, joins Michael Barba of Ridge, from motorcycle safety group Long Island ABATE, at the annual Kick Stands Up Motorcycle Poker Run and Car Show for Homeless Veterans on Sunday, July 24, 2016, in Centereach. (Credit: James Carbone)

More than 100 motorcycle riders and enthusiasts from Long Island and other states cruised into Centereach on Sunday with two missions — to have fun and raise money for

homeless local veterans.

Organizers of the fourth annual Kick Stands Up Motorcycle Poker Run and Car Show for Homeless Veterans declared the mission accomplished. Dozens of people showed up at Centereach's VFW Post 4927 to cheer on riders of all ages, enjoy live music, prizes, raffles and giveaways and peek at a sleek, colorful collection of classic and modern cars and motorcycles.

Corey Schwartz, 63, a Nesconset veteran of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, took part in the poker run along with friends and family. An avid motorcycle fan who rode his bike for the event in years past, Schwartz said the roughly 50-mile poker run was a great way to have fun while helping fellow veterans.

"With biking, you don't need an excuse to do it," he said. "But this is fun, and it goes for a great cause."

Proceeds from the event went to the Suffolk County United Veterans, a Ronkonkoma-based nonprofit that provides housing and support services for local war veterans.

"Long Island has a lot of veterans," said Paul Debiecki, 62, of Dix Hills, who was on hand for Sunday's fundraiser. "So the . . . [community] comes together and helps support them."

"It's good to see that kind of support," said Artie Knapp, 67, of Massapequa, also a veteran of the 101st, who served in Vietnam. Still, Knapp, who was wounded in combat and keeps a piece of shrapnel from his injuries embedded

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on a gold chain close to his heart, said more needs to be done on the federal level to help veterans.

While last year's event raised roughly \$10,000, organizers, who estimated that roughly 120 motorcyclists took part in Sunday's event, said the proceeds this year would likely exceed that amount.

Richard "Trooper" Autorina, chaplain of Post 4927 and president of the Long Island chapter of the U.S. Military Veterans Motorcycle Club, said the idea for the poker run fundraiser came about five years ago after the VFW got in touch with organizers from a similar event. The event has steadily gotten bigger, he said, thanks to switching its date from Saturday to Sunday, word of mouth and efforts from organizers in getting sponsors.

"It's a lot of hard work, a lot of knocking on doors. It takes everyone's efforts to do this," Autorina said. "It's veterans giving back to veterans."

Schwartz's nephew, Matt Swerdlow, 33, of Patchogue, and his friend Anthony Lewis, 26, of Islip, smiled as they recalled their motorcycle trek, both riders taking a detour from the normal route that gave them freedom to cut loose on their trip.

For Lewis, who was enjoying his first time in the Centereach-based motorcycle fundraiser, riding was fun but the cause also was close to home, because he had friends who served in the armed forces.

"To some degree, everybody knows a veteran," he said. "So this is a way for us to give back to them."

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