

PROTECTING INDEPENDENCE

Non-profit offers financial aid to our veterans

by Jay Anderson

EL CAJON, CALIF., JUL. 1— At El Cajon Harley-Davidson, the Independence Day weekend began with a particularly appropriate poker run for a fitting cause. The riders came out to benefit Support the Enlisted Project (STEP), a local military-related non-profit that helps our men and women in uniform and their families. According to its website, “STEP assists junior active duty enlisted members and recently discharged enlisted veterans and their families in Southern California facing financial crisis achieve long term financial self-sufficiency through counseling, education and grants to alleviate critical near term obligations.”

STEP Vice President Kathi Bradshaw was obviously excited as she described the purpose for the second annual poker run. “The money we raise here goes to support active-duty military and recently honorably-discharged veterans and their families who are in a state of financial crisis, to overcome that crisis, and build strong financial futures.” When asked why a motorcycle event, Bradshaw observed there are a “lot of veterans and active-duty guys” who are motorcycle riders, so STEP looks at it as a brotherhood of bikers and veterans coming together to help one another.

One of the veterans out that Saturday morning was Pat Rogers, who quipped there is no “D” in his last name, because his “family couldn’t afford” it. A member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars

Motorcycle Club (VFW MC), Pat can rightly be referred to as “Doc,” because he is a retired U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman who served in both Navy and Marine Corps units. (Some may be unaware that the U.S. Navy provides the medical and religious support to Marine Corps commands.) According to Rogers, on his first STEP poker run, the VFW MC was “stepping up” to help by manning some of the stops on the run. In addition to veterans like Rogers, there were active-duty military personnel out to support STEP.

One of them was U. S. Navy Chief James Watson, who had just come off duty that Saturday morning. As he told it, he told his wife he had some things to do and rolled over to El Cajon Harley-Davidson. He had seen the event flyer and heard about the run through the motorcycle safety group on board his ship, the USS Decatur DDG 73, where he is the electronics chief responsible for taking care of all the radar and communications equipment on board.

Active duty personnel like Watson, veterans like Rogers, and the other riders checked in and registered with Rachel Henderson, STEP’s event manager. Asked if she was joining the ride, she said no, though she rode with Mike Harris of the El Cajon Harley Owners Group on the inaugural poker run last year. In addition to the registration and first card draw, Henderson was also offering tickets for the 50/50 and the opportunity drawing.



(L-r.) VFW MC member, STEP VP Kathi Bradshaw, and STEP Event Manager Rachel Henderson at registration

Around 10:00 a.m., it was KSU for the stops in the East County area of San Diego. These included the Biker Shack in Alpine, the gas station at the Barona Resort and Casino, and Starbucks in Ramona. On the first of July, the weather was near perfect for time on the road, relatively cool and sunny. After hitting those three card draws, it was back to El Cajon Harley-Davidson for the final card draw and lunch from Big J’s BBQ. Over lunch, the riders were entertained by Sickstring Outlaws, self-described as playing country music with an “aggressive sound.”

Once lunch was finished, it was time for the opportunity drawing and the 50/50 along with the announcement of the poker low and high hands. In unsurprising displays of generosity, the winners of



U.S. Navy veteran Pat Rogers stepped up to help

the 50/50, low hand, and high hand (Pat Rogers, no less), told STEP to keep the winnings. American patriots stepped up to help STEP help our junior enlisted military personnel and their families. All in all, it was a terrific way to start the Independence Day weekend. ▶

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