

What the National Veterans Awareness Ride is All About

The people who participate in the National Veterans Awareness Ride (NVAR) come from all walks of life, are all ages, are Veterans and non-Veterans, are motorcycle riders and non-riders, are members of different religions and have different political leanings.

What brings us together is a strong belief in the goal of the NVAR: “To honor, support and remember all the men and women from all branches of the military”.

We accomplish this mission locally throughout the year through a variety of charitable and civic events, but on a national stage, we address our mission during a thirteen day ride in May from Auburn, CA to Washington, DC.

There are three major efforts that make up the 13 day NVAR:

1. Each day on the ride, we visit Veterans Homes and Hospitals. The medical staff and the Veterans know we are coming and they eagerly await our arrival...for some good conversation, perhaps a shared lunch and a few stories to be swapped.

Many of the Vets in the homes on our ride don't get a lot of visitors, so our stopping by means a great deal to them. The short term patients in the hospitals also greatly appreciate a visit from our riders. We really care about their well-being and we want them to know that we are thinking of them.

Having a conversation, sharing a laugh or just holding a person's hand can mean the world to a hurting or lonely Veteran.

2. In towns, big and small across the country, we participate in memorial services. The NVAR always provides a wreath laying squad and the local communities frequently provide honor guards, choirs, bands, rifle salutes, taps, student groups from schools, e.g., Cadets, Jr. ROTC, and local residents who share words appropriate for the memorial service.

When we join the residents in recognizing and honoring the local citizens who made the ultimate sacrifice serving our country, we have mutual emotions and become like family. Tears of remembrance for relatives, friends or unknown warriors are shared by everyone at our solemn memorial services.

3. Our visits to schools have special purposes.

We believe it is important to plant the seeds among young people of the goodness of service to our communities and our country.

We believe that we can help students understand the importance of honoring our Veterans and understanding the sacrifices that our Veterans have made.

We believe that by sharing our experiences of visiting Veterans in hospitals and homes we can encourage young people to help others who may be having a difficult time.

To summarize our school visits, we believe that promoting service to communities and our nation, respect for Veterans, and giving of one's self to help others will help make a strong individual and a stronger America.

The NVAR means a lot to those who participate but there are a few events that affect our riders in very personal ways.

Our memorial services at the Mideast Conflicts Memorial in Marseilles, IL offer us the opportunity to remember service members who have given their lives in the Wars in the Middle East. For our younger riders, this is a somber time to think about friends and relatives who have served.

Our ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, brings back many memories for our older riders. Visiting The Wall is emotional for everyone but particularly for those who know people whose names are engraved on the memorial. It's cathartic for all of us to touch the names of buddies who were lost so young and so long ago.

Near the conclusion of the NVAR, we participate in a wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. This is our final salute to all who have gone before us.

For many of us who participate on the National Veterans Awareness Ride, there is a healing that takes place among us. Helping others helps many of us find peace within ourselves. Honoring Veterans in hospitals and homes and remembering friends who are no longer with us can help heal emotional wounds deep inside our riders.

Helping others and the camaraderie of a group dedicated to a selfless mission make the NVAR an experience that has an important impact today and will be remembered forever.

And, of course, we couldn't do the National Veterans Awareness Ride without the help of police and fire fighter escorts, Veterans' and fraternal organizations, school teachers/administrators, and volunteers across this great country.