Daily Journal • Daily Messenger

Tuesday, June 23, 2009

Heroes welcomed

Wounded Warriors visit for rest, relaxation at Keowee Key

By JESSICA SIBLEY
jsibley@dailyjm.com

KEOWEE KEY — A group of servicemen and women injured while serving our country has come to Oconee County for a well-deserved vacation.

In conjunction with the Greenville Hospital system and the Roger C. Peace Rehabilitation (RCP) Hospital, residents from Keowee Key and Spinnaker Cove have worked tirelessly on behalf of these heroes.

Dubbed the Wounded Warrior Regiment, Marines who have been injured in service are selected to remain in active duty. While active duty in this regiment does not include further presence in battle, these Marines contribute to their country in other ways.

To help keep their morale up and offer these warriors some rest and relaxation, residential communities around the country can host a group of these soldiers for days at a time.

This week, Keowee Key will make history.

With the help of Keowee Key resident Allen Funk, the plan to welcome and host these Marines has come full circle.

"It gives me chills to look back upon how many people came together to make this happen," Funk said. "From neighbors in my community to Keowee Key officials, to food suppliers, to emergency departments, to the community members who just donated a few dollars — the response has been inspiring."

Twenty-five Marines will be getting comfortable at Keowee Key, most slated to stay at Tall Ships condominiums while others will be welcomed into private homes.

To start the three-day event, an escort of private motorcycles, police and fire personnel led the Marines in a large-scale motorcade, with more than 400 bikes participating. The ride began at Greenville-Pickens Speedway and continued down to Keowee Key.

These particular Marines were wounded in Afghanistan or Iraq, traveling from Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and Camp Pendleton in California.

The list of activities that the community has helped line up for the Marines is a long one. With block party dinners, special speakers, options to fish, water ski, jet ski, kayak, go on boat tours, visit Death Valley, golf, tennis and other indoor activities, Funk hopes for a successful visit for each Marine.

"I think they will have a lot of fun," he said. "We plan to show them the best time possible."

And although this year Keowee Key has taken the residential reins by hosting the event, Funk hopes to see it even grow bigger next year.

"We have gotten some many calls from people wanting to help and open their homes," he said. "I can't even imagine what next year could be like."

But in the end, while we see snippets of war on the news, none of us can imagine what these Marines have endured.

"For these young men (and women) who were in harm's way and received life-threatening wounds, often involving the loss of a limb, the war is real and up close," Funk said. "This visit to the Upstate gives us an opportunity to show our appreciation for these heroes. We want them to know that we understand freedom is not free and that we appreciate their sacrifice."



Jessica Nelms/Staff

A procession of motorcycles lead the Wounded Warrior Regiment along Highway 123, on Monday afternoon.