The Marines have landed!

400-plus motorcycles lead parade into Keowee Key

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Walter Smith, a Marine hailing from Honea Path, was seeing it all for the first time.

"Look around. It's awe inspiring," Smith said as he peered over the 480 or so motorcycles at the J.B. "Red" Owens Sports Complex in Easley that provided an escort for the Honoring Their Service event.

"I come from a military town where mostly everyone is in uniform all the time. It's a way of life. It's the norm. Here, people come out to thank us," Smith continued. "That's just awesome. It really moves you."

For the fourth consecutive year, Keowee Key residents and city officials organized the Honoring Their Service event that runs through Thursday.

Hailing from the Upstate and Camp Lejune, in North Carolina, 41 Marines will kick back and soak up the sun at Keowee Key this week.

Kim Smith, a retired Marine and motorcycle enthusiast, came out to ride in the motorcade and show his support for his "brothers."

"I'm a jarhead," Kim Smith said. "Once a jarhead, always a jarhead. It doesn't matter where you are, your fellow Marines are your brothers and sisters. You can walk up to them, shake their hand and say, 'Semper Fi' and it's all understood. I back them today and always."

Pauline Hocket, a Seneca resident and mother of a serving Marine in Iraq, said she sees her son in every one of the young men who stepped off the service bus on Monday afternoon.

"I haven't seen my son in 10 months," she said. "Getting to come out here and show them my support gives me some much needed comfort. I hope I help return that simple favor to them, as well."

Larry Wincop, retired Army general from Clemson, said he's participated in the motorcade each year.

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Southern hospitality for Marines

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
THE JOURNAL

EASLEY — As the nearly 500 motorcycles continued to line up at the J.B. "Red" Owens Sports Complex in Easley, organizers looked on with a smile.

The fourth annual Honoring Their Service event kicked off on Monday afternoon with a 35-mile motorcade consisting of about 480 motorcycles, dozens of emergency vehicles and 41 Marines who were greeted with high flying flags, clapping families lining side streets and thousands of peace signs held up along the route from Easley to Keowee Key in Salem.

Tim Callahan, co-organizer of the event, said the turnout was the strongest its been since the event's inception.

"It's always such a great thing to see so many folks come out to support these guys," he said. "The Marines really love the strong showing of support."

This year, each Marine traveled in Jeep Wranglers provided by members of the Jeep Club of the Upstate.

Terri Cassell, co-founder of the group, said she was thrilled to be participating in the motorcade.

"Jeeps have always been a big part of military history," she said. "And a lot of our group members are veterans themselves, so they thought it was a great way to help give back."

Allen Funk, Keowee Key resident and key player in bringing the event to Keowee Key four years ago, said once again, the event is one for the books.

"It's so great," Funk said. "The Roger C. Peace Rehabilitation Hospital and all the organizers do such a great job each year. These guys deserve to know we have their backs."

The Marines will be at Keowee Key until Thursday morning participating in jet skiing, fishing adventures, kayaking, archery, water sports, golf, hiking and tennis, in addition to formal dinner events.

A community-wide concert and barbecue is scheduled for 6 p.m. today at Gignilliat field in Seneca with fireworks at 9:30 p.m. Admission is free.

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JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Parade-goers show support with American flags and patriotic colors as they greeted Marines in Seneca on Mond

MARINES: 'God bless America'

FROM PAGE A1

"The outpouring of support for these guys is a necessary thing that we should all be doing," Wincop said. "Sure, the turnout is great, but I wouldn't be entirely happy until every single person lined these streets. We can't forget that their dedication is exactly what leads to us being able to work and even stand on the side of the road waving a flag. God bless America."

Kelly Kinker, of Easley, said she doesn't have any family members in the military, but feels strongly about showing her support for their service.

"It gives me goosebumps," Kinker said. "All these men look so young. It takes my breath away to know what they are facing on a daily basis. The least I can do is say 'Thank You' while they are in town."

According to Charlie Hall, a major in the U.S. Marine Corps and coordinator for the Wounded Warrior Regiment, part of the reason this event is so powerful lies in the warm hearts of resident hosts.

"Part of what is so difficult for these guys is the ability to transition into this life when they come home," Hall said. "Having people open their homes and ears to these guys and remind them how much they are appreciated is so important."

Each Marine is set up with a host resident who will accommodate them with a place to stay, food and transportation to the activities each day until they leave on Thursday morning.

Read The Journal for continued coverage of the event this week.

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ALISHA CHAMPION | FOR THE JOURNAL

Motorcyclists are seen gathering Monday afternoon in Easley before kicking off the fourth annual Honoring Their Service event.



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Thousands of people line the streets to say thanks and wave flags to the 41 Marines who are visiting Keowee Key this week for rest and relaxation.



JESSICA SIBLEY | THE JOURNAL

Walter Smith, a Marine, embraces a resident who thanked him for his service during the welcoming event at the J.B. "Red" Owens Sports Complex in Easley on Monday afternoon.



JESSICA SIBLEY | THE JOURNAL

The Returning Warriors are joined by retired Marine Corp League members as they arrive at the J.B. "Red" Owens Complex in Easley prior to participating in a motorcade that included 480 motorcycles and dozens of emergency vehicles.