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Allen Funk: We can honor their service

By Allen Funk

It started as a simple question.

On Jan. 11, 2008, I was heading with my wife, daughter and grandchildren for a vacation at the beach and felt a tingling in my feet. Two days later I was in a hospital intensive care unit — paralyzed from the neck down, with difficulty breathing and double vision. I had been afflicted with a neurological condition called Guillian-Barre Syndrome.

I was not getting better and, thankfully, was transferred by ambulance from Georgetown to Roger C. Peace Hospital-Rehabilitation, part of Greenville Hospital System University Medical Center. For the next 60 days, a team of gifted and devoted physicians, nurses, therapists and case workers worked to bring me to a point that I could come home.

Faith, a devoted family, supportive neighbors and a trainer that said "no" to the possibility of anything but a full recovery have now brought me to the brink of that full recovery.

I wondered many times how to say "thank you" to a team that saved my life. Words were inadequate. But I unexpectedly had my answer with a simple question — "Don't you live on a lake?" — asked by Stan Healy, Roger Peace's administrator.

For years, the rehab hospital had offered rehabilitative clinics on everything from water skiing to golf to those living with disabilities. At the request of Stan, I and others from Keowee Key, along with Roger Peace therapists and the U.S. Marine Corps, became part of task group that looked at how to offer a similar experience to Marines injured in combat.

The result has been the creation of a remarkable event. On Monday, the Upstate will welcome 25-30 Marines from Camp Pendleton and Camp Lejeune who were wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Using adaptive equipment as necessary, Marines will have the opportunity to fish, kayak, play golf, tour the lake on boats and even water ski. Or — if they prefer — to simply sit and enjoy the beauty of Lake Keowee before returning to their bases on Thursday.

I invite the public to show its own support of the Marines as their motorcade makes way along a 31-mile route from Roger Peace Hospital to Keowee Key. The cars, vans and even motorcycles in the motorcade will be flying American flags; we hope to see as many flags waving along the route. The motorcade will travel along U.S. 123 until it turns right on to State 130 in Seneca. We hope that merchants along the way will fly American flags and post welcoming signs. Several fire departments plan to have ladder trucks along the route with the ladders aloft and flying American flags.

The most stunning "viewing," however, will take place after the motorcade joins with its patriotic motorcycle escort at Greenville-Pickens Speedway at 2 p.m. The escort could be as many as 400-bikes strong. The motorcade is expected to pass along the 123 Bypass in Easley at approximately 2:15 p.m. and pass through the intersection of State 130 and U.S. 123 in Seneca at approximately 2:35 p.m.

Support from the Upstate has been phenomenal. Keowee Key has rallied behind this event, with more than 100 people involved in all aspects of the project, opening their homes and hearts to make this a reality. Likewise, staff from Roger Peace Hospital have also donated their time. Businesses and citizens have contributed funds and "in kind" donations. As I spoke to veterans soliciting everything from hamburgers to motorcycle rider escorts, I could see that this event was not only honoring our Marines, but reaffirming the service of all veterans of all wars.

Unless one has a family member in the military, the War on Terror being waged in Iraq and Afghanistan is largely beyond our understanding. We read about it in the paper and see news clips on