



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HOPWOOD AMVETS CHOSEN FOR NATIONAL TOUR OF HONOR

Uniontown, PA – A Fayette County veterans memorial has been selected as an official stop on the National Tour of Honor.

A self-guided, self-paced motorcycle tour across the United States, the Tour of Honor serves as a fundraiser for Fisher House Foundation; Gold Star Family Memorial Foundation; and the Gary Sinise Foundation: First Responder Outreach. For 14 years, thousands of riders have participated in local, regional, state and national routes between April and November.

The Vietnam Veterans Inc. Prisoner of War-Missing in Action (VVI POW-MIA) Memorial at George C. Marshall Amvets Post 103 is one of just seven sites across Pennsylvania chosen for this year's tour.

Fayette County Veteran Affairs Director Brian Bensen said the site's inclusion is "a wonderful honor for the Amvets and our veterans."

"I think it's neat that we're being recognized for having one of the best Amvets in the country; for all the time they put in and everything they do for our veterans by providing a safe space for them to meet," Bensen said. "For a local memorial site to be chosen as part of a national program is a reflection on what our Fayette County veterans have done for this country. This is the most patriotic community I've ever been part of, and for someone to notice that and make us part of the Tour of Honor is really exciting."

Each year, the sites and routes are kept secret from riders until they're announced April 1. Many participants organize events along their chosen routes as a way to meet other veterans from around the country.

Riders who visit all seven Pennsylvania sites will receive a "Magnificent Seven" certificate from Pennsylvania Sponsor Joe Yarzebinski of Allison Park. Other state sites are located in Newtown Square, Newville, Petersburg, Sheffield, Shohola and Towanda.

"We deeply appreciate being able to join you in honoring local veterans and heroes by placing your memorial on the Tour of Honor for 2024," Yarzebinski said.

Riders can also earn pins and certificates through the national organization, and they're encouraged to participate in additional tours throughout the year. Many area businesses offer discounts and other incentives for riders visiting their local Tour of Honor site, which are often listed on the Tour of Honor Facebook page.

According to tour organizers, the VVI POW-MIA Memorial was chosen because the Vietnam War “took lives from Fayette County every year from 1965 through 1972 – a total of 50 men.” One of those men never returned.

SP4 Samuel Shimek was 21 when he was hit by a grenade in Binh Long Province on Dec. 9, 1968, causing the ammunition he was carrying to explode. His body was left behind, and recovery mission soldiers were unable to locate him afterward.

“It is unknown if he survived and was taken prisoner,” the organizers said. “The memorial’s single dog tag bears his name.”

The site also features the Gold Star Dogwood Tree, which was dedicated in May 1999 to Fayette County’s 50 Gold Star mothers whose sons’ names are listed on the memorial. Vietnam Veterans Inc. holds a public vigil at the site every Armed Forces Day, honoring Shimek and more than 81,500 other American service personnel still missing from military conflicts.

George C. Marshall Amvets Post 103 is also the site of other community and veteran affairs events all year long. On Saturday, Bensen’s office held the first Fayette County Veterans Affairs Expo at the post.

“This is one of the first times that we’ve actually been in charge of organizing an event like this. We’re usually invited to participate in expos our state legislators host throughout the year, so what’s really unique about this one is that it’s a one-stop-shop for our veterans,” Bensen said. “It was born from my suicide task force committee. This was their idea, so there are more vendors than we’ve ever had in one place – not only traditional V.A. services, but realtors who can help with housing, information on service jobs and even employment opportunities. Our goal was to provide every service a veteran could ever need in one place.”

Several hundred guests attended the expo, where Bensen and volunteers served breakfast. Approximately 30 vendors, including Fayette County Drug and Alcohol; Fayette County Behavioral Health Administration; Veterans Court; Coldwell Banker; other healthcare organizations and many more spent the morning connecting with local veterans and their families.

“It was beautiful to be able to serve them breakfast and thank them for their service,” Bensen said. “It’s great when our veterans come out to these events just for the camaraderie alone, but to be able to give them access to whatever help or resources they might need is really a blessing.”

To learn more about upcoming veteran events, visit www.fayettecountypa.org/158/Veteran-Affairs; email bbensen@fayettepa.org; or call 724-430-1241.

To follow along with registered Tour of Honor riders, learn more about tour routes or to register yourself, visit www.tourofhonor.com.

George C. Marshall Amvets Post 103 is located at 123 Buttermilk Lane in Hopwood. For more information about the facility and its memorials, visit www.hopwoodamvets.net.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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