



**Orange County American Legion Riders
Orange County American Legion
Hudson Valley Honor Flight**

Hudson Valley Honor Flight Youth Guardian Program

12 April 2024

1. **General.** The Hudson Valley Honor Flight (HVHF), with the support of the Orange County American Legion Committee (OC Legion) and the Orange County American Legion Riders (OC Legion Riders), has initiated a program in 2024 to identify, vet, and fund youth guardians on Honor Flights departing from Stewart International Airport (SWF) in Newburgh, NY.
2. **Purpose.** The program provides youths to escort Vietnam-era and other veterans on Hudson Valley Honor Flights. While this provides youths a unique, first-hand opportunity to meet these heroes and gain a greater understanding of the meaning and value of patriotism and service, it also helps assure these veterans that their legacy and stories will live long beyond them. As such, this program is intended to help the passing of the baton of leadership from one generation of Americans to the next.
3. **Program Concept.** The program has two components: the identification, vetting and selection, and preparation of youth guardians; and, funding to cover the costs of each youth guardian.
 - a. **Youth Guardians.** Youth guardians are two types: high school seniors and young veterans.
 - 1) High school seniors – Members of established community-based youth programs and clubs. They must be high school seniors at least 17 years old at the time of the Honor Flight in question and vetted and endorsed by their clubs and the high school principal's office based more on leadership and citizenship potential than academic performance. Examples include but are not limited to: Junior ROTC; Boy and Girl Scouts; National Honor Society; Interact (Rotary), Leos (Lions), Kiwanis, and many other community service and civil society organizations.
 - 2) Young veterans – Current members of Active, Guard, or Reserve military commands or veterans under the age of 40 who are serving or have served honorably, vetted through their organizations and/or with the assistance of the local American Legion Post. Qualifying veterans who are also members of community or county level police, firefighter, or first-response organizations are also highly desired.
 - 3) Each sponsoring school, organization or unit is limited to selection of one primary youth guardian candidate and one ready alternate youth guardian per Honor Flight.
 - 4) Each Honor Flight should have 10 youth guardians – five high school seniors and five young veterans. The HVHF may amend these quotas as necessary or desirable.
 - 5) The OC Legion Riders coordinate the processing and selection of youth guardian applications with the sponsoring organizations, schools, Legion Posts and the HVHF. They also coordinate funding of both the youth guardians and the program in general.
 - 6) Both selected candidate and ready alternate youth guardians must attend the mandatory HVHF guardian training session prior to participation. Failure to do so will disqualify them and a qualified ready alternate shall take their place.
 - 7) All youth guardians who successfully complete an Honor Flight mission will receive an HVHF certificate that credits them with 20 hours of community service.

b. Application Requirements.

- 1) In addition to the eligibility requirements just described, youth guardian applicants must meet or exceed the eligibility requirements in the HVHF guardian application. In addition to the completed HVHF guardian application form, applicants must provide:
 - A short resume of no more than two pages, including but not exclusive to their military and/or community service and school achievements.
 - An essay of no more than 250 words on why they wish to be a youth guardian.
 - At least two letters of endorsement from club advisors, teachers or school administrators, military or organizational supervisory chain, significant community leaders, etc. The second endorsement letter is from their principal's office or unit commander or organizational leader or manager, as appropriate.
- 2) Applicants must apply using the downloadable HVHF form, with the above-mentioned documents, for processing through their organizational (club/school or military unit) chain of approval. Submission is through the local American Legion Post and OC Legion Rider youth guardian coordinator to the HVHF for acceptance and financing.
- 3) Youth guardian applications for Honor Flights in the spring must be received by the HVHF no later than 30 January; applications for Honor flights in the fall must be received by the HVHF no later than 30 June of that year. Applicants are highly encouraged to begin the process about 60 days before these dates.
- 4) The HVHF will determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether a selected youth guardian who cancelled participation in an Honor Flight may be considered in future.
- 5) Ready alternates not required for a designated flight that remain eligible will receive first consideration for another flight, unless they withdraw their candidacy.
- 6) The HVHF has the final word on which youth guardians participate in the flights.

c. Funding. The OC Legion Riders coordinate the funding of each youth guardian, regardless of source, with the HVHF upon HVHF acceptance of youth guardian candidates. Funding to cover the cost of each youth guardian (currently \$500 per guardian) comes in two ways.

- 1) The first is directly from the club, community or donor organization or local American Legion Post sponsoring a specifically identified youth guardian. For those youth guardians, the sponsor provides a \$500 check, made out to "Hudson Valley Honor Flight" and including the name of the youth guardian in the memo portion of the check, to the HVHF in coordination with the OC Legion Rider coordinator.
- 2) The second is from the OC Legion Riders, for youth guardians with no specified sponsor. Upon vetting and acceptance of the youth guardian candidate, the OC Legion Rider likewise issues a check to the HVHF.

Similarly, donations to the program come in two ways:

- 3) Direct sponsorship of an identified youth guardian, as described above.
- 4) General donations collected in any amount by the OC Legion Riders and used to pay for unfunded youth guardians for unspecified flights. These will come either through OC Legion Rider fundraising events and activities or by donations in the form of checks made out to "American Legion Riders Post 151" and including "youth guardian" in the memo portion of the check, sent to: Orange County American Legion Riders, American Legion Post 151, P.O. Box 516, Middletown, NY 10940.
- 5) Direct sponsors or donors of \$500 or more will receive recognition in mass media releases and social media posts from the HVHF, OC Legion/Riders, and affiliations.

- d. Recognition of Youth Guardians and After-Event Actions.
- 1) After mission completion, the HVHF issues certificates of appreciation to all youth guardians who have successfully accomplished their Honor Flight missions. The certificates will also credit them with 20 hours of community service.
 - 2) Youth guardians are highly encouraged to provide a presentation or report on their experience to their sponsoring and affiliated organizations, explaining what they saw and learned and why others should apply for the program.
 - 3) They are also encouraged to post pictures of themselves and their veteran on their personal social media feeds, as appropriate, tagging or linking to the HVHF, OC Legion/Riders, their school, organization, unit, etc.
 - 4) Youth guardians may also maintain contact with their veteran, as appropriate or desired by the veteran.
- e. Program Expansion. The OC Legion and HVHF are currently expanding the program to include the annual flight out of Westchester Airport (HPN) in White Plains, NY. The OC Legion/Riders are coordinating this with American Legion District 9 (Lower Hudson Valley) and soliciting sponsorships from Legion Posts in Rockland, Westchester, and Putnam Counties.
- f. Coordination Points of Contact.
- 1) OC American Legion/Riders: Christopher Holshek, Activities Director & Secretary, OC Legion Riders, holshek@hotmail.com or 1.845.800.6880.
 - 2) Hudson Valley Honor Flight: Carol Smith, Vice Chair, carol.hvhonorflight@gmail.com, 1.845.568.7048.