

Agent Orange Awareness Day 2022 Rider

by Cat Ludwick

In March of 1996 my late husband, James Holbrook, aka “Jimmy” was diagnosed with Type II diabetes. On May 8, 2012 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. It was aggressive, had already metastasized to his bone and was terminal. On July 16, 2013, just 435 days later, Jimmy took his last earthly breath.

Both illnesses were service connected and a direct result of his exposure to Agent Orange while serving in the United States Air Force in Vietnam. By the time Jimmy died we had spent nearly two decades fighting the federal government for his disability benefits, learning how to help others get the benefits they had earned and learning everything we could about Agent Orange. Who it affected, how it affected them and honoring the memories of those we lost due to its horrific diseases along the way. During his last months on earth, I promised him I would continue to Educate, Honor and Remember those afflicted by or lost to

Agent Orange for as long as I draw breath.

That is how our annual Agent Orange Awareness Events came to be.

Each year for the last four years, the Town of Gilbert has lit up the Gilbert Water Tower in Orange for our Vietnam and Korean War Veterans afflicted by Agent Orange. This year the Town of Fountain Hills lit the fountain in orange as well.

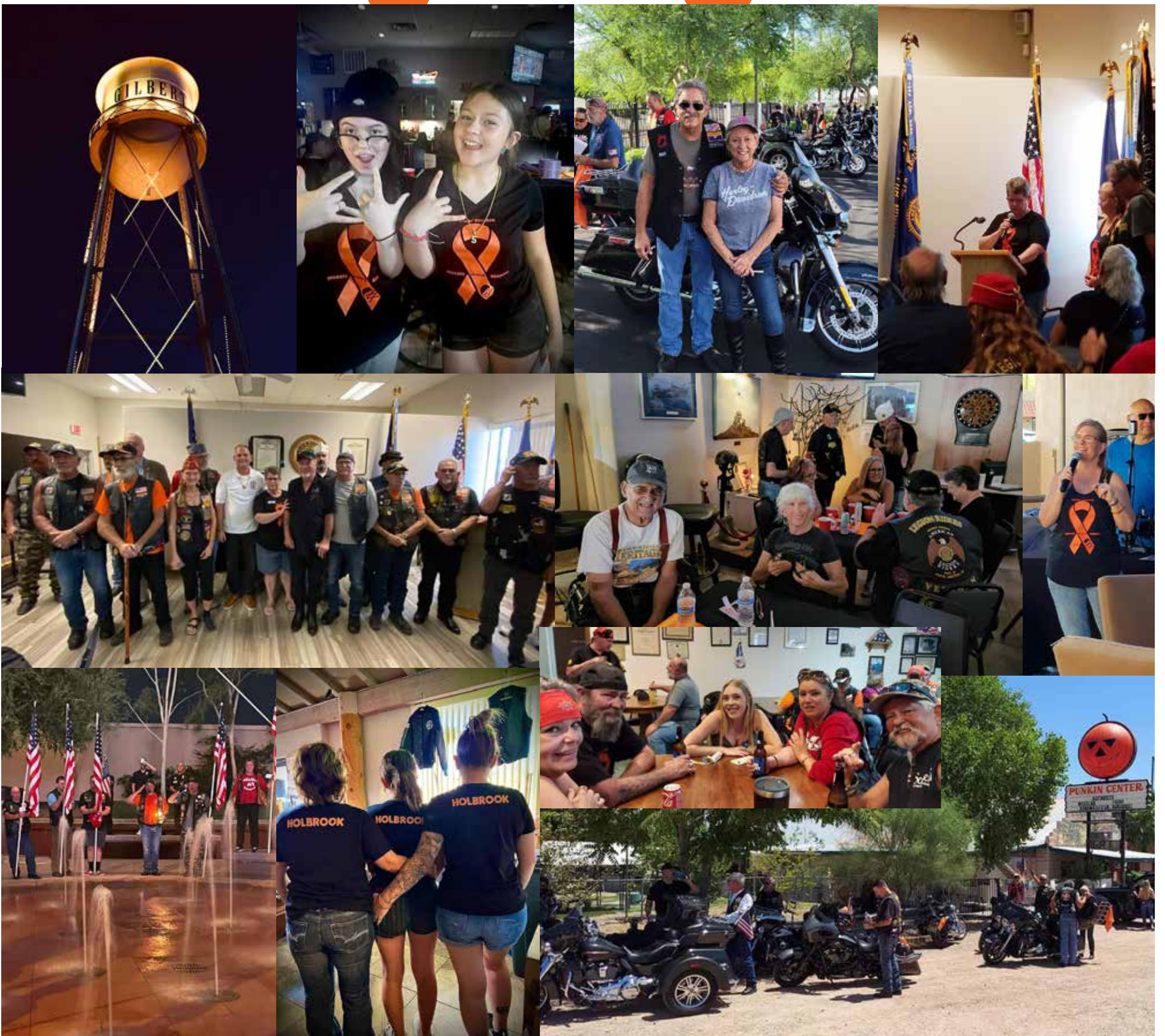
Every year the primary event is held someplace different, donates funds raised to a charity that supports our Vietnam Veterans and is slightly different than the year before. This year it was drastically different. We held three events on the same day at three separate locations. The first event of the day was a no fee breakfast ride. Thirty eight riders on thirty one bikes staged at Superstition Harley, rode the Roosevelt Loop to Los Hermanos Restaurant & Lounge in Superior, out to the American Legion Post 4 in Globe, they continued on to the Pumpkin Center, Jake’s Corner Bar and Grill, and ended that ride at American Legion Post 58 in

Fountain Hills for the main event.

More than two hundred people attended the primary event over a four hour period of time. There was a DJ on the back patio, raffles, 50/50s, Agent Orange themed shirts, cups and other items sold inside the lounge and an emotional ceremony held to Welcome Home our Vietnam Veterans. During the ceremony, various individuals talked about how Agent Orange had affected their loved ones and their lives. Stories of love and loss were shared and sixteen Vietnam Veterans were recognized, given a special pin authorized by the Department of Defense and given the Welcome Home they should have received more than 50 years ago. Rick Kreiberg of Veterans Affinity emceed the ceremony. Four Agent Orange widows and multiple family members were also recognized for their losses.

In memory of those lost, we read the names of 64 Arizona Veterans who have not only lost their lives due to Agent

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Orange, but have also been honored in Washington DC through the In Memory Program. These Arizona Vietnam Veterans names, faces and biographies are on display on the Virtual Wall at the Smithsonian Institute year round. The ceremony was concluded with the playing of TAPS.

After the event concluded, there was a Memorial ride from Fountain Hills to the Gilbert Water Tower, including Pastor Ron Earle, founding pastor of Living Word Gilbert and several members of the community. There were over two dozen people holding flags supplied by the Patriot Guard Riders, who read names of the fallen as candles were lit in their memory. Nearly 40 were present. Pastor Ron Earle, founding Pastor of Living Word Gilbert concluded the ceremony with our benediction.

The American Legion, Sons, Riders and Auxiliary were all well represented by members at every level including the Legion Department Commander Mike

Simon and Auxiliary President Barbara White. There were multiple past Department and District Commanders and Presidents present. The Purple Heart Association Representative of District 12 also attended. There were members from Legion Posts/ Auxiliary Units 2, 5, 27, 35, 39, 41, 58, 91, 117, HOG Riders, the VFW, DAV, Elks Lodges of Chandler and Fountain Hills, Down n Dirty and Veterans Affinity present for the event as well as the general public. Our guests ranged in age from a few months into the 80's. It was honestly both humbling and overwhelming at the same time.

Our primary sponsor this year was the American Legion William Bloys Post 2 in Tempe, our host was American Legion Fountain Hills Post 58. We had major financial support from the Wayne V. McMartin American Legion Post 91 in Chandler, as well as amazing gifts donated by Superstition Harley Davidson, Here Fishy Pontoon Rentals, Sew Baby Now, Scottsdale Gun Club and so many more.

Due to the generosity of everyone, we were able to present a donation check for over \$6700 to Veterans Affinity. An organization that serves our older generations of Veterans.

On behalf of the Agent Orange Awareness Project, Holbrook and Ludwick families and in memory of my late husband, Jimmy Holbrook, who we started this project for nine years ago, I say THANK YOU ALL from the bottom of our hearts. We could not continue our mission of Educating, Honoring and Remembering those afflicted by Agent Orange without your support and continued love.

For God and Country,
Cat Ludwick

For those of you who wish to donate to this Agent Orange Awareness Project, donations are being received via the American Legion Riders of Post 2 in Tempe. Please be sure to designate "Agent Orange Awareness Project" when making your donation. Thank you.

