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Lawyer takes a ride for veterans

By Jerry Crimmins
Law Bulletin staff writer

A Chicago lawyer is one of the leaders of a group of 30 bank executives, firefighters, police officers, business owners and wounded soldiers who took off on a 750-mile motorcycle trip to Washington, D.C. on Wednesday.

Anthony J. Nasharr III, managing director of the Chicago office of Polsinelli, Shughart P.C., said the trip has become an annual fundraising event for him and some of his friends who are part of The Wounded Heroes Foundation.

On Wednesday morning, the Wounded Heroes Motorcycle Ride took off from the parking lot of the Hinsdale Oasis on Interstate Highway 294 and headed for Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.

There, the cyclists are scheduled to host a picnic for more than 250 wounded veterans and their families, distribute backpacks of personal items to returning, wounded veterans, and visit many hospitalized veterans.

The group also raises money through its annual event.

Nasharr said the group donated \$50,000 last year and again this year to the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago to help the institute conduct its Paralympic Military Sports Camp. That camp will be held from Aug. 22-29 in Chicago.

The camp offers current and former military service men and women with physical disabilities an opportunity to explore and participate in sports.

The Wounded Heroes Foundation Motorcycle Ride began in 2005.

"Several of my acquaintances and I rode out informally to Bethesda Naval Hospital" in Bethesda, Md., in 2005 "and got connected to a number of soldiers recovering at Bethesda then and sort of did informal support functions to assist them in their transitions," he said.

The first year, the group bought plane tickets for some family members to allow them to visit their wounded veterans.

"It was a moving experience to meet with these men and women who had been injured in the conflicts. We just felt the need to do it again," he said. Other people asked to join them.

Seven motorcyclists took part in the original 2005 trip. In 2006, 16 motorcyclists rode to Brooks Army Medical Center in San



Marina Makropoulos

Antonio. That hospital specializes in catastrophic burn injuries, he said.

Anthony J. Nasharr III, managing director of the Chicago office of Polsinelli, Shughart P.C., watches a line of motorcycles in the parking lot of the Hinsdale Oasis on Wednesday shortly before riding out to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

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In Texas for the first year the group put on a picnic for wounded veterans and their families, Nasharr said. This is now a feature of the annual trip.

In 2007, the group rode to the naval hospital at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. They donated \$10,000 that year to help buy equipment for the hospital's new recreation center.

Since 2008, the group has ridden to Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

This year's Wounded Heroes Foundation Motorcycle Ride includes three wounded soldiers who ride three-wheel motorcycles and three more riding in "a motor home chase vehicle," Nasharr said.

"It's easy to get connected to these men and women when you meet them," he said. "I've probably met over a thousand men and women in their hospital beds, just connecting with them and telling them how grateful we are for their service.

"They in turn are grateful that people remember them and visit them, and we're

not the only ones. There are quite a few that do. They feel honored for that."

He said he believes wounded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and other current conflicts get "a little more recognition these days" than was the case for World War II veterans or veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

"We need to be open to keeping them included and make sure they're allowed to live a full and complete life even though they have suffered a debilitating injury."

Mark Robbins, a Lake County Sheriff's deputy who was wounded in action as a Navy Seal, said he rode on one of the motorcycle rides two years ago with Nasharr.

Robbins said Wounded Heroes Foundation events "not only host donors, they host wounded soldiers. You end up meeting people you never knew and you talk about your injuries and your recovery."

The motorcycle ride, he said, "is a good way of spreading awareness" about wounded veterans.

Nasharr is a board member of the Wounded Heroes Foundation, 161 N. Clark St.