

14th Annual Warriors ATV Ride in South Range, Wisconsin

CATHY LAREAU

Sawyer County Snowmobile & ATV Alliance

Fifteen years ago, Mike and Karen Nevin, from Poplar, Wisconsin grabbed the idea for an annual ATV benefit ride from an unlikely source — a charity motorcycle ride highlighted on an episode of Gene Simmons Family Jewels.

Mike comes from a patriotic military family; his own father proudly served in Vietnam.

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Warriors ride group stopped to cross Hwy. 2 in Douglas County. The riders include Joe Pries (left) from St Francis, Minn. (ATV), who pulled up to visit with UTV rider Lucas Brackin from Wheeler while waiting to cross the highway.

PHOTO BY TINA COOK

ATV/from A15

Mike had envisioned a military career for himself but was prevented from realizing his dream when diagnosed with a disqualifying heart condition. Since that time, his mission has been to support and give back to our active troops, their families, and veterans in need.

The Nevins' hometown memories are planted in Douglas County so that is where they hold their rides on the first Saturday of March each year. The event benefits our military active troops, veterans and their families.

The first annual Warriors ATV ride was held in 2011 with 34 riders attending — back then, that was a big group! Their first ride garnered \$2,500, which was donated to the Wounded Warriors Project.

With every passing year, this event grows and the Nevin group gains even more experience. They now run a large, highly organized ride with the help of their son, Cody, and daughter, Cassie, sister and brother-in-law: Jessa and Paul, plus another dozen family members and friends who make up their core group.

Planning takes several months and includes making and distributing flyers and other advertising,

acquiring raffle prizes, donations, and ride merchandise, mapping out a route and finding ride stops that can handle large crowds, plus securing adequate parking for all the trucks and trailers.

The Nevins are thankful to all the sponsors who helped them with this event. Futurewood Corporation, a forest management company based out of Hayward, Wisconsin, generously donated the use of their Douglas County facility for riders' truck and trailer parking!

This year's ride was on Saturday March 2. Registration opened on Friday night at the ride base, the Log Cabin Tavern in South Range, where 773 riders paid their \$25 entry fee, and had the option to purchase a \$15 wristband for a pizza buffet. A nice display of donated raffle items enticed arriving riders and other visiting patrons.

ATVers came from all over to participate in this event and as Mike rattled off some of the states, I was shocked to hear that some came from as far away as Alaska and Texas in addition to Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Illinois, Wisconsin, North and South Dakotas and Tennessee.

Riders filled available lodging in Solon Springs, St. Croix, Brule and the Superior areas and they brought

with them close to 100 trucks and trailers.

Most of the 378 machines were side-by-sides, but there were a few ATVs as well. A couple of the volunteers estimated the value of just the machines on this ride to be between \$9 and \$15 million, not including riders' gear or the trucks and trailers used to haul them here.

Saturday morning was almost spring-like when the group departed at 10 am to begin their journey. They stayed in one large group with Nevin as the lead, and his brother-in-law riding tail, to make sure no one was left behind. Approximately 30 volunteers were scattered throughout the long line of riders, plus they enlisted the help of a few volunteers with trailers to pick up machines if they broke down.

I asked Mike how they control such a large group of riders, and he said that they do a lot of self-policing and they've only had a few minor issues over 14 years. The Douglas County Sheriff's deputies also assist with traffic management and road crossings, plus Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wardens and first responders are present if needed.

Douglas County's roads are open to ATV use, so Nevin has many options for planning the best ways

to get around the county and reach intended stops. The ride route changes every year and consists of a variety of trails, roads, and gravel roads.

Nevin plans four stops throughout the day's ride, and he said that it's difficult to find venues large enough to accommodate so many buggies, riders and their bathroom needs and suspects that even more porta potties will be needed next year.

At each lively break, riders partake in 50/50 raffles, snacks, military trivia contests and music; some of it run DJ-style by Nevin's son, Cody. From the pictures and videos I've seen of this year's ride, I can tell the riders really had fun, all I saw were smiles!

The group made it back to the Log Cabin Tavern around 6 p.m., which concluded the ride. As riders dispersed, there were many hugs, handshakes and promises to come back for next year's Warrior ATV Ride.

The work doesn't end for the Nevin family once the ride is over — now they must tear down, clean up and organize where the donations will go — every year is different, but they usually collect between \$5,000 and \$20,000 to help military folks and their families.

In the past, they've purchased two power wheelchairs for veterans, and

paid many utility and phone bills, rent payments, moving expenses, hotel stays for out-of-town medical appointments, home repairs, heating and cooling units, vehicle repairs, plus provided food, medicines and medical supplies.

They've also donated to local American Legion and VFW posts for veteran outreach programs. All recipients are first vetted by County Veteran Affairs workers, who verify the person's service record, before they can receive donations.

If you know of a military person or their family, who needs help, please reach out to Mike Nevin directly at 715-815-0369 or email him at mknevin21@gmail.com.

Mike and Karen thank all the riders who attended the 14th annual Warriors ATV Ride and donated so generously to help our military folks — this event would be nothing without the riders! Come November, watch for announcements and information on next year's ride.

One ride at a time, the Nevins are giving back, and chipping away at the problems faced by our military veterans, active troops and their families. I'm sure I speak for many by throwing back a huge THANK YOU to the Nevin family for bringing together our motorized sport community for such a great cause!