

2nd Annual Boat Rides for Dutchess County Veterans

by Leslie Spencer

On Saturday June 10th, Whites Marina hosted the 2nd annual boat rides for Dutchess County veterans. The event was the brainchild of George Mann in 2016 who wanted to give back to the veterans in a unique and fun way.

He contacted Nelson Rivera of the Dutchess County Office of Veterans Services to find out if any veterans would be interested in taking a boat ride and enjoying a free lunch. Last year 20 veterans were interested in taking the run. This year the amount doubled to 40 veterans and their guests, which meant Whites Marina needed more boaters to volunteer their boats for the run and they made it happen. Twenty-four boaters stepped up to show their respect for the men and women who served our country and fought for our freedom.

The day began with coffee and doughnuts donated by Dunkin Donuts of Wappingers Falls at 10:30. After checking in the arriving veterans, Tony Acquisto played the bagpipes performing songs that represented each of the military branches. In front of the flag pole a bench was decorated with yellow flowers to represent the yellow ribbon often used during the gulf war but now widely recognized as a symbol of the ties connecting us to the men and women serving overseas. On each side of the flower were ballcaps, one from each branch of the service, which were then given away at a



drawing at the end of the day. The bench also adorned with an American flag represented the fallen soldiers.

Next came the flag raising ceremony. George Mann led the group in prayer that was

dedicated for the fallen, active and retired members of the military. The flag was raised by a local veteran followed by the singing of the National Anthem performed by John H. Carter III. Vets were then assigned to boating Captains where they then were led to board the boats. The fleet of 24 Boats headed south to West Point on a picture-perfect day. Speaking of pictures Scott Harrison of Scott Harrison Photography and Scott Snell of Xfactor Aerial took pictures and video both from cameras and drones which allowed us to view the entire landscape as the boats traveled, as well as the activities that were happening on the ground.

While they were out on their boats Jeff Bose and myself along with another retired vet and his wife prepared the food for the picnic that followed. Food was donated by ShopRite of Fishkill which included 100 hamburgers, 100 hot dogs, and rolls. Mike Todd at Rainbow pools purchased one six-foot sub, while FleetFeet donated another. The subs came with potato and macaroni salad. Thanks to Kim Caruso and Fleetfeet at the South Hills Mall who also provided the vets with a 20% discount card. Robert Gropper at My Brother Bobby's Salsa donated several varieties of salsa and chips. Bannerman's Tours donated 18 free tours of the



The Captains.



Island for a later date. Financial support was given by The Sons of Italy (Joe DiMaggio Lodge #2248), Hopewell Junction and Dan Gallagher of Poughkeepsie NY. Two dozen balloons were donated by Party City in Wappingers Falls.

The vets had a nice time getting to know each other, while some reunited after many years apart. All that took part that day were honored to have provided our military men and women with a nice day out. Thanks to all who gave of themselves in any way they could to support such an awesome cause.