

## **“Travels with Harley” at WHS**

By Eugenia Moskowitz

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Washingtonville, NY - When U.S. Army Colonel (and Washingtonville grad) Christopher Holshek's 30-year military career ended, he decided to see what the America he had been so dedicated to defending was really all about. So he took his Harley-Davidson for an 8,000 mile trip across the United States to find out what it means to be an American.

With a nod to John Steinbeck's famous memoir "Travels with Charley," Holshek found himself, as he said, "on a mental and spiritual rediscovery encountering rugged landscapes and rugged people, creating connections, and conjuring recollections that that ignited new insights into our current condition."

"The future of our nation," he said, "and with it our world, depends on each and every one of us, every generation, taking our own journey to find out who we are, what we're about, and what we're willing to do to face the challenges of our times." Holshek wanted not to write just a memoir but to call upon others to "find a personal and national identity and encourage people to step up to global citizenship starting in their own communities."

To this end, he kicked off promotion of his new cross-country National Service Ride on May 5 at his alma mater Washingtonville High School as three hundred students gathered, in the same auditorium Holshek had himself in 1978 been a drama club crew member, for an inspirational talk about what it means to be American.

"When Holshek first contacted me," Washingtonville Central School District's director of English and social studies Bill Ormiston said, "he thanked me for my service before I could thank him for his." This was the kernel of Holshek's message to the students: by bringing in members of Washingtonville's police department, local volunteer fire departments, teachers and students with various community-service passions, he urged people not only to give back to the community but to actively become part of their community. Holshek said people like nurses, educators, and journalists "engage in civil dialogue and give us a country worth defending."

"No place on earth is like America," he said. "And 95 percent of you have no clue how good it is. You don't think so, go to Syria. American communities, with their diversity and human capital, are our strength, and you all get to take part in a system our founding fathers created, with all its faults, to be the best functioning in the world. But every generation has to find this out for itself. So put your smart phones down for a second and reach out to other people, then use technology to discuss what you've discovered."

"The structure and freedoms of our country are our up-side," he said, "but with rights comes responsibility, and if you don't meet those responsibilities, your rights will crumble. And your primary responsibility is to be a good citizen. Be someone I'd be honored to defend. Engage in respectful difference of opinion, don't just parrot the 'politically correct.' And serve your fellow man. You don't need a uniform, you only need to be involved in your community. When we do this, the country fixes itself, and it doesn't matter who's in the White House."

Community involvement also builds confidence and humility, he said, and is pragmatic. "When you look for a job, companies love applicants who show leadership by being engaged with their communities. Potholes are fixed by those living closest to them. In Iraq, the people

expect the man ‘up there’ to fix everything. Or not. In America, we the people do everything. We have been given the power to create our world.”

While Holshek sees travel as a form of education, he stressed that education is a form of travel. “You don’t have to make a physical journey, some prefer to travel with their minds, and both can transform you.”

The National Service Ride is open for anyone to join for as long as they like, with Holshek stopping along the way “in schools and other places for Americans who have served and sacrificed in all walks of life to tell their stories” to promote a dialogue of national unity and create leadership among individuals. For more information, go to [www.nationalserviceride.net](http://www.nationalserviceride.net).

#### CAPTIONS:



Colonel Christopher Holshek, in a Wizard Nation t-shirt, spoke to a crowd of 300 students at his alma mater Washingtonville High School to share what he learned as he wrote his cross-country motorcycle memoir “Travels with Harley.”



The bike that took Colonel Christopher Holshek on his 8,000 mile trip across America.

(Photos by Eugenia Moskowitz)