

Moving a Divided Nation Forward, Two Wheels at a Time



Woodbury, NY, December 10th 2021 – “Washington is not going to fix America; America is going to fix America,” retired colonel Christopher Holshek concluded in his National Service Ride [project video](#). The sooner enough of us act upon the common-sense notion that we do better for ourselves when we do better for each other, the country can again move forward in meaningful way. “People here have more power to change their country than they may otherwise believe,” he added. A more universal, and ground-up sense of service, he deeply believes, can do more for the country more than politics. “If politics is so much the problem, he pointed out in a *Medium.com* [article](#), “then how can it really be the solution?” For this Army civil affairs veteran, that epiphany began with a motorcycle ride over a decade ago.

His thirty-year career ending, Holshek took off on his Harley-Davidson for an 8,000-mile adventure across the United States. Inspired by John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley*, he went out to discover the country he helped defend. Pondering what it means to be an American in today’s world, he found himself on a mental and spiritual journey of rediscovery. “I realized that our future constantly depends on each of us, in every generation, taking our own journey to find out who we are and what we’re about to face the challenges of our times. So, I wrote the book.”

Far more than a motorcycle diary, [Travels with Harley – Journeys in Search of Personal and National Identity](#) is a stirring memoir that retired Marine general and former Defense Secretary James Mattis called “an antidote to pessimism and a reminder of what makes life worth living.” Service to others, it concludes, is how Americans can find real, human connectivity and step up to national and global citizenship, starting right at home, to transform the nation. “Change in this country always comes from the bottom up, then the politicians eventually catch up,” he explained on [The Law Business Insider](#). As a deeply divided nation struggles to find its way ahead on its own long journey as an experiment in self-governance, this positive and empowering message couldn’t be more needed.

But writing the book wasn’t enough. The native of New York’s Lower Hudson Valley has been taking its message on the road and into schools. The [National Service Ride](#) project leverages motorcycling’s appeal to mobility, freedom, adventure, community, and always moving ahead to stay in balance to promote his idea. The project helps generate a new narrative of citizenship and service across societal and generational lines to pass the baton of generational leadership to help move America forward. “When we become better citizens, we become a better country – because, when you serve your community, you serve your country,” he tells his audiences. “It doesn’t require a uniform.” Besides, he adds, “if people truly wish to honor military veterans, police, firefighters, first responders, medical and health care professionals, and others in uniform that put their lives on the line on all our behalf, then they should strive to make this [a country worth our sacrifices](#). They need not go far, for there are myriad ways to become citizens as responsible to neighbors as to nation – patriotism being something you do and not just feel.”

The project’s main platform involves two-part events, the first in which service veterans of all kinds ride to schools on motorcycles and conduct hour-long seminars that bring one generation of service veterans looking to give back with emerging citizens looking for ways to pay it forward. These interactive sessions help America’s youth better understand the meaning and value of service to their country, their communities, and themselves through role models from previous generations and peer examples from their own, motivating them to sign them up for community service-learning opportunities at the one-stop “service-learning fairs” that follow the seminars.

Encouraging and empowering young people to do good work and help solve common problems, starting in their own communities, also improves their capacities for personal advancement – building leadership, teambuilding, problem-solving, and other interpersonal skills vital to economic livelihood and social viability in the 21st century. Schools, can more efficiently and effectively connect students with service-learning opportunities – enhancing civics-type educational outcomes to produce well-rounded members of society. This also helps instill a greater sense of individual empowerment, community resilience, and, ultimately, national cohesion.

At the same time, military veterans, police, firefighters, first responders, medical services, etc. can find better connection with their communities in a positive and meaningful way, improving inter-community and generational relations and reducing social tensions. The school events synergize veterans and community service organizational capacities and extend their platforms and local initiatives to improve outreach to youth and recruit younger members. The project’s mass and social media-friendly platform also helps these organizations raise public visibility and awareness, with impacts on branding, membership, volunteerism, and fundraising.

Motorcycle associations like the American Legion and VFW Riders, Harley Owners Group, and Rolling Thunder, as well as clubs like the Blue, Red, Green, and 'Nam Knights, Buffalo Riders, and others have high numbers of military, police, first response, and medical and health services veterans. As role models and mentors, they can roar into schools, lending their considerable social capital to kick-start conversations on what citizenship and service mean to each and all of us. Then the students take their own first steps forward in “that long journey we must all take to find out who we are and what we’re about” – after school, over the summer, or beyond high school graduation.

Uniformed veterans in particular have a critical role to play. “Our mission,” Holshek tells other veterans, “is really not complete until we have helped pass that baton [of leadership] to the next generation, giving them a chance to go forward with what we’ve learned and make their way through the future, just as we did.” Besides, [commenting on the inaugural](#) Juneteenth Underground Railroad Freedom Ride he helped organize in Orange County, NY, “we should not forget that our military is... in fact, the single largest, most successful multicultural institution in history, united in the defense of the cause of freedom. Our veterans have come from every walk of life and corner of our society... and if our military can come together in affirmation of that cause, so can the rest of us in its confirmation.”

A national narrative of service can help transcend differences and foster a collaborative mindset to establish common ground for much-needed civil dialogue on matters inexplicable in social media memes. It also helps develop an internal moral GPS to navigate a complex, dynamic, digitized, and information-overloaded world, with more courage and self-confidence, overcoming the pervasive sense of fear that has gripped many. “America cannot long remain the land of the free if it is no longer the home of the brave,” Holshek warns.

To test and refine his concept and get the wheels rolling, he appeared at various schools on the East Coast. Then the COVID pandemic hit. As the project re-emerged this year, the Orange County American Legion adopted it as Legion Riders program. Along with the VFW, Buffalo Soldier Riders, Rolling Thunder NY3, and 'Nam Knights, Holshek and the Legion Riders conducted service-learning seminars and facilitated service learning fairs at Pine Bush High School’s annual [Leadership & Law Academy](#) in July and at Monroe-Woodbury and Washingtonville High Schools in October and November, respectively. Meantime, they picked up allies and partners at the county Office of Veterans Affairs and Youth Bureau as well as the Hudson Valley Veterans Task Force, with whom they are planning to expand the program in and beyond the Lower Hudson Valley.

“The school’s were a little hesitant, especially coming out of the pandemic,” Holshek noted, “but once they got to see how this all works – and the enthusiasm and interest in service many kids showed at the service-learning fairs, even with the little effort they made, now they’re really leaning into to it and looking to scale it up into a much larger event next year.” What’s more, extending the service-learning fairs virtually through school website, links to portals by county youth bureau, apps, and so on. This program

The project’s low-cost, high-yield platform fits perfectly with the Legion’s vision of “veterans strengthening America” and the pillars of Americanism, Youth, and Community. More and more local Legion members are convinced the project should become a Legion Riders program nationwide. While slowly popularizing it in New York, the ground group in the Hudson Valley intends to raise it at the national headquarters level and “franchise” its platform around the country, believing it will be a game-changer for both the Legion and the country.

Meanwhile, Legion and motorcycle club members from elsewhere in the country, seeing the posts on the project’s [Facebook page](#), are reaching out to learn more. The project is also receiving a media boost by the [The Motorcycle Channel’s](#) recent Juneteenth Ride coverage and interest in producing a video series on the project’s progress.

Holshek, who now coordinates the Legion Riders in Orange County, thinks the initiative and its message can gain traction with most Americans, regardless of political or social following. His main challenge has been getting the word out – which anyone can help do, especially on social media.

“This is going to be as big as people want it to be,” he adds. “After all, America is in and of itself an amalgamation of over 330 million individual journeys along the same roads. We’ll start off in the hundreds, perhaps the thousands – and see how big a dent we can make. And help make more of an *Unum* of the *Pluribus*.”

Find out more at www.nationalserviceride.net and through associated social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, and LinkedIn; hash tags: #TravelswithHarley and #NationalServiceRide.

To arrange an interview, send a message to nationalserviceride@gmail.com.

Travels with Harley is available in print and electronic format through [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), and most major independent book distributors online as well as directly from the publisher, Inkshares.com. Book reviews are most welcome.