



Orange County American Legion Riders National Service Ride Project

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The Orange County American Legion Riders' National Service Ride project is an adaptive, community-based service-learning initiative comprising a coalition of veterans, community, school, and public organizations. Legion Riders and other veteran bikers roar into schools to mobilize youth to better themselves, their community, and their country through service-learning – first at an hour-long Service-Learning Seminar and then at a Service-Learning Fair.

Enlisting a value-proposition approach, the Seminar helps teenagers better understand the meaning and value of service through role models and peer examples. Students have embraced its uplifting and empowering messages about "the best way to thank a veteran is to make this a country worth their sacrifice," how "serving your community is serving your country," and how "service requires neither a uniform nor a change of address." Then they learn "what's in it for me?" in how service learning helps gain self-confidence, leadership, teambuilding, problem-solving, and other interpersonal skills.

Youth also learn to see social connection, beyond their smart phones, in service to others. At the school-run Fairs, they benefit from interacting with local community service and veterans' organizations, volunteer and charity groups, as well as local businesses, finding out what they can do after school, over the summer, or beyond high school graduation. They can also learn more through school websites using portals and apps provided by the Orange County Youth Bureau and other organizations.



Adaptable and flexible to fit growing educational community service requirements and the constraints of each school, the project's low-cost, high-reward platform extends curriculum to help students efficiently and effectively find service-learning opportunities best for them. Pine Bush, Monroe-Woodbury and Washingtonville High Schools already like its "one-stop" delivery method to encourage and empower young people to help themselves by helping others, whether they sit in the front or the back of the class.



Together, military veterans, police, firefighters, first responders, medical service professionals, etc. find better connection with their communities, raising public visibility and awareness, with impacts on branding, membership, volunteerism, and fundraising. The project's mass and social media-friendly platform synergizes limited local organization capacities, helping them grow younger. Its empowering and unifying narrative on citizenship, service and social responsibility helps connect service veterans looking to give back with young citizens looking to pay it forward. In passing the baton of generational leadership this way, we give our youth a

better chance to go forward together in a complex and challenging world.

Adopted by the Orange County American Legion and Legion Riders, riding with groups like Rolling Thunder and the Buffalo Soldier Riders and 'Nam Knights, the project is partnered with Orange County's Youth Bureau and Veterans Service Agency, and the Hudson Valley Veterans Task Force. In 2022, it is expanding its program in the area, eventually to make it an American Legion program in New York and nationally.

To learn more, go to the project website and check out its Facebook page. Or reach out to Legion Rider coordinator and project founder retired Army Colonel Christopher Holshek at holshek@hotmail.com.