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Torch passes in Ride To Provide;

*** Total donations equal \$7,420**



(from left) Levy County Commissioner Rock Meeks, Levy County Commissioner Mike Joyner, LARC Executive Director Betty Walker, cook Jason Coates, LARC Board Member Keith Maynard (who said the prayer of blessing before the launch of the ride) Levy County Commission Chairman John Meeks and Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks pause for a photo opportunity just before it was kickstands up for the riders.

Story, Photos and Video

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*** Updated Oct. 25, 2016 @ 11:47 a.m.**

LEVY COUNTY – A huge American Bald Eagle picked up an armadillo off of Levy County Road 347 in front of the Carriage House Farm about 45 minutes before more than 20 motorcycles passed across that asphalt on Saturday morning (Oct. 22).

The giant bird, one of America's living national symbols of freedom, had grabbed a late breakfast while helping clear the path for motorcyclists enjoying a drive through the country.

The 12th Annual Ride to Provide for the Levy Association for Retarded Citizens included some changes not only in who led the efforts this year, but also in the route. The eagle's participation was something beyond the realm of the humans involved in helping other humans.

The previous rides were led by Sean Mullins and his family. Mullins retired from the Levy County Sheriff's Office, started teaching art to people and then moved out of the state.

The event on Saturday morning in the cool, clear fall air on Saturday was led by AmVets Post 42 of Chiefland. That group of veterans led by AmVets Post 42 Cmdr. Jim Hess, who is also president of AmVets Riders 42, offered a free breakfast to all participants. Eggs, potatoes and toast were on the menu in that regard and the aroma of the breakfast offerings wafted across the grassy parking lot to greet people as they arrived.

Commander Hess said 10 of his post members were participating in helping this event this year.

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The 54-mile route this year went from the LARC campus on State Road 24, to the west of U.S. Highway 19. Riders went west on SR 24 to Levy County Road 347, which winds by the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.



Protecting the riders are (from left) LCSO Citizen On Patrol (COP) Dave Tucker, LCSO Sgt. Max Long COP Ron Morgan and COP Lt. Dan Kelly.

Cruising through the Fowler's Bluff subdivision and next to the Jemlands unrecorded subdivision, the motorcyclists enjoyed an escort by LCSO Sgt. Max Long leading the group.

Three volunteers with the LCSO Citizens On Patrol Dave Tucker, Ron Morgan and Lt. Dan Kelly joined Sgt. Long to assure a higher degree of safety for the riders as they passed through the country that is full of wildlife that may enter a roadway at any moment.

Likewise, the sergeant and the COP members helped the motorcyclists cross the intersection of CR 347 at State Road 345 (the location of Carter's Crossroads Convenience Store) without breaking stride. They continued on CR 347 eastbound to U.S. 19, where they went south to SR 24 and then west to the LARC campus.

This route was all right turns.

And as it turned out, the whole event was all right again this year.



A few of the 20-plus riders of the day are (from left) Paul Cowart, Frank Storti and Michael Feriole.

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Some riders enjoy breakfast thanks to AmVets Post 42.



Kary Colson (in the background, on the left), a member of AmVets Post 42 of Chiefland, watches as LARC Executive Director Betty Walker accepts a \$500 check from Pat Plemmons of AmVets Post 422 of Fanning Springs.

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(from left) Members of the Blue Knights Florida Chapter 30 Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club Octavio Aguero and his wife Miriam Aguero stand behind LARC Executive Director Betty Walker as she holds up a check for \$2,375 with (still going left) Members of the Blue Knights Florida Chapter 30 Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club Darrell Cothron and his wife Lisa Cothron and Matt Fortney and his wife Cara Fortney.

The AmVets Post 42 (and Riders and others in AmVets) gave LARC Executive Director Betty Walker a check for \$500 to help the clients. That was presented by Pat Plemmons of AmVets Post 422 of Fanning Springs.

Blue Knights Chapter 30, who have been involved in every ride for all these years, gave Walker a check for \$2,375 to help the clients.

*** The total donation amount as of Tuesday morning (Oct. 25) was \$7,420, Walker said. Walker added that she is thankful to God, and she appreciates all of the donors who contributed in the Ride To Provide this year.**

Upon returning to the LARC campus, riders enjoyed opportunities to buy a chicken lunch \$6 per plate lunch to help LARC.

All proceeds from this fundraiser go to help LARC. AmVets District XVI Commander Joe Oxedine was among the people helping the event continue this year, with the retirement of Mullins.