



A 52-minute walk on the Columbia Trail was a fundraiser for 52 Reasons to Love a Vet, a veterans assistance nonprofit group. For more photos, visit NJ.com/hunterdon. (PHOTOS BY RICK EPSTEIN/HUNTERDON COUNTY DEMOCRAT)

CALIFON

A mother's love benefits veterans

With more than 52 reasons to love a vet, the 52-mile walk in Califon Island Park on Sunday was a piece of cake for these volunteers.

By Rick Epstein
Hunterdon County Democrat

Despite the heat, about a dozen people rendezvoused at Califon Island Park at 11:30 a.m. Sunday for a 52-minute walk in support of "52 Reasons to Love a Vet," which is a new nonprofit organization within the Hunterdon Healthcare Foundation.

The walk was sponsored by Fairmount Presbyterian Church of Tewksbury Township.

The "52 Reasons" organization takes its name from the decks of playing cards it is selling to raise funds to help veterans. The face cards all have thematic artwork, while the others contain facts, such as "Troops with multiple deployments and combat exposure are at

greater risk of developing substance abuse problems, specifically with alcohol and prescription drugs," and "22 veterans commit suicide each day."

But for the chief organizer, Ella Rue of Lebanon Township, there are 53 reasons to love a vet. Her son is a sergeant in the Army National Guard. Last year he was sent out of a VA hospital with open MRSA sores, after being told he'd had all the medical care he was entitled to. He'll be OK, says his mother, but she wants to help other soldiers and vets.

So his mom, in collaboration with Bob Wise, CEO of Hunterdon Healthcare, set up the new nonprofit. Artists from all over were invited to create pictures on

428,396

Veterans living in New Jersey

21,999,108

Veterans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, in total

87

Veterans in New Jersey are under 20 years old

68,950

Of N.J.'s veterans are 65-69 — va.gov

the theme of veterans and what their nation owes them. The pictures are then used for a glossy book and for the deck of cards.

The only Hunterdon artist in the deck is Joe Ciardello of Milford. Others are from as far away as Japan.

The originals are part of a traveling display that can be seen at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass., November through January. The nonprofit group's mission is to offer financial assistance to veterans for educational, health, dental or mental-health needs.

Among those taking the 52-minute walk on the Columbia Trail was Kevin Cahalan, a Vietnam War combat vet, who is commander of the Warren-Hunterdon Military Order of the Purple Heart. Besides his distinguished presence, he was especially welcome because he brought an envelope full of money for the cause.

For more information, to buy a deck of cards or a book or to make a donation, visit 52reasonstoloveavet.org.

Rick Epstein, NJ Advance Media, repstein@njnpublishing.com