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Wednesday, December 26, 2012

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Skating for the troops

Approximately 30 skate and longboarders traveled to Robb Field Skate Park in San Diego to support the fourth annual Skate for the Troops event on Dec. 9. Approximately 50 participants attended the event that raised more than \$500 for the Semper Fi Fund.

Since its inception, Skate for the Troops events have raised more than \$2,500 for the charity.

Derek Smith, the event founder and a Mechanicsville native, explained that some changes to the event have made it more accessible to potential skaters.

"The first time I started this, I wanted to do a crazy, ridiculous amount of distance like 30 miles. We did it from Oceanside to Torrey Pines, which is like 20 miles," said Derek, a former heavy equipment and motor transport operator in the Marine Corps. "Last year we did about 12 miles and this year we're doing seven. It's getting shorter and shorter; but it's not for me, it's for everyone else."

Derek's sister, Army 1st Lt. Janelle Smith, also a Mechanicsville native, and adjutant with the 145th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, added that improved publicity has helped spread the word about the event. However, she expressed concern that potential volunteers may think they aren't right for a longboarding event.

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Photos by Cpl. Lisa Tourtelot Skaters take off Dec. 9 from Robb Field Skate Park in San Diego for the fourth annual Skate for the Troops. After a seven-mile trip around Mission Bay, participants gathered for a raffle of donated skating merchandise and free lunch.



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"I'm also concerned that some of [active-duty military] don't skate, so they feel like they can't participate in any way. But there is so much more that they can do," said Janelle, who also works at the Veterans Village of San Diego as a therapist.

Franklin Quiros, a retired Marine Corps martial arts program instructor and Oceanside, Calif., native was one of the participants in the Dec. 9 event. "I got retired for [post-

traumatic stress disorder], and nothing ever worked," he said. "This is what works for me — skating."

Quiros' long hair, piercings and tattoos belie his conservative past in the Marine Corps.

"I wanted to come out here to support the Semper Fi Fund," Quiros said. "I know what it does and I know what it stands for. If I had more money, I'd donate more money. One day I might end up using the fund, too. So, I might as well do a skate for it."

This year's Skate for the Troops was a seven-mile trek around Mission Bay, followed by a raffle of prizes donated by local skate and longboarding shops and a free lunch from the InSlider food truck.

Charlotte Smith, the event's organizer and San Diego native, explained that her husband, Derek Smith, founded the event in order to support his fellow Marines while doing what he loves — longboarding.

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