

Free Rides for Wounded Veterans Return to Jersey Shore



The Festival of Speed is not just about showcasing the abilities of high-performance vehicles — it is also about giving back. Several of the events throughout the three-day gathering are raising donations or awareness for the Wounded Warrior Project, a veterans service organization established in 2003 to honor and empower veterans of the United States Armed Forces who incurred a physical or mental injury, illness, or wound, in service to their country on or after September 11, 2001.

Monies collected at the Atlantic City Car Show, being hosted at the Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino on June 21 from noon to 4 p.m., will benefit the Wounded Warrior Project. The event is free and open to the public, though donations are encouraged. In addition to the auto show, which will feature over 40 offshore race boats on display, as well as some of the most exotic automobiles in the world, an awards brunch is being held by the New Jersey Performance Powerboat Club in honor of the veterans

service organization.

The brunch, which will take place at the Golden Nugget and serve as an awards ceremony for the winners of the Atlantic City Poker Run being held the night before, will also highlight a special program the NJPPC holds in high esteem — Operation: Shore Fun!

During last year's Festival of Speed, members of the NJPPC invited 38 wounded veterans and their immediate families down to the Jersey Shore for a day of free boat rides and food. Of last year's Operation: Shore Fun!, Bob Christie, a member of NJPPC said, "We enjoy [what we have here] because people are willing to defend our freedom and do things we don't have to do, and I can't thank them enough. It's worthwhile and it's the least we can do. To be able to take them out and have them ride the boat at 70 or 80 miles per hour and enjoy the wind in their face was very special."

Enjoying the rush experienced in a high-performance powerboat is a thrill wounded

veterans like Nick Lucarelli, an Army National Guard member who did two tours of Iraq, aren't likely to forget.

"During my first tour, I was trying to find my 'happy thought,'" Lucarelli told NJPPC members at last year's Operation Shore Fun! "My 'happy thought' became being on a boat in the Mediterranean off the coast of Italy where my family is from, relaxing and sipping a glass of wine. I had to learn more and the Wounded Warrior Project and the New Jersey powerboaters made that possible."

As an Army Ranger with two tours each in Iraq and Afghanistan, Andrew Correa came to Operation: Shore Fun! no stranger to adrenaline rushes, but still found himself impressed with his ride, telling the NJPPC, "The combination of speed and comfort of the ride, having the adrenaline rush yet knowing you are completely safe. It's been

a while since my dog tags were flying [out behind my head]."

After the success of last year's event, the NJPPC is expecting 100 Wounded Warriors and their families to make their way to Atlantic City on June 21 to take part in Operation: Shore Fun!, as well as the other events planned as part of the three-day-long celebration of all things speed.

For more information on Operation: Shore Fun!, visit www.njppc.com. For more information on the Wounded Warrior Project, visit www.woundedwarriorproject.org.