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North Carolina trio to Let Freedom Ride

By **BILL ARCHER**
Bluefield Daily Telegraph

BLUEFIELD — A trio of bikers left Kitty Hawk, N.C. Tuesday evening on a ride to Bluefield to participate in this Saturday's Let Freedom Ride 5.

"All of you are thinking about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and you know you have folks over there getting killed, but you don't know who they are until you see their names on those crosses," John Risoldi Sr., said. Risoldi is a fire department sergeant from Kitty Hawk.

"You hear all these numbers, but you don't have the impact until you see the crosses," Risoldi said. "You know that each cross represents someone who was killed in action and that each cross represents an entire family that has been changed forever."

"It doesn't matter whether you're for this war or against it," Dave Hoare, a real estate broker from Kitty Hawk said. "All of us are supporting our troops."

"I'm a veteran of the U.S. Navy," Ron Burscak said. "I served from 1975-'79. It means something to me."

Risoldi, 54, Hoare, 56 and Burscak, 52, converged on Bluefield to meet with two other friends — Scott Lyles and Don Brousseau, both of Canada — to participate in the 2007 Let Freedom Ride motorcycle run that starts at 8:30 a.m., Saturday morning from the Cole Harley-Davidson lot in Bluefield, takes a pass through Lotito Park, stops at the Bluefield City Auditorium for a breakfast courtesy of the American Red Cross, and then on a ride through Athens and Talcott, north to Alderson and back through Peterstown, Narrows, Va., and Rocky Gap, Va.

"I love riding through the mountains," Burscak said. Burscak runs a Coca-Cola distribution company that supplies the outer banks. "When you ride along the beach, it's beautiful, but the scene never changes. When you ride in the mountains, the scene is always changing and it's always beautiful." Risoldi rides a 1976 Superglide, Hoare an Electroglide and Burscak an Iron Horse.

Volunteers with the Bluefield office of the Central West Virginia office of the American Red Cross have been working since November to build the crosses — each of which bears the name of a soldier, Marine, sailor or airman killed in action in Iraq or Afghanistan. "We have had a lot of volunteers working on this," Phyllis Sheets, program coordinator of the Red Cross Bluefield office said.

Sheets said that Bill King of Blue Ridge Wood Products donated the wood, the Welch Vocational Technical Center assembled the crosses and Jim Rose of Experience Works painted all 3,800 crosses. "We checked the 'WashingtonPost.com' every day until Memorial Day weekend," Sheets said. "We will pick up there where we left off last year."

The Red Cross placed 2,400 crosses in the park in 2006. This year, the crosses are grouped according to states. "That will make it easier for people to find the name they are looking for," Sheets said as she stood near a group of crosses bearing the names of those who entered the service from Arizona — a group that included the name Spc. Patrick D. Tillman, who left the NFL's Arizona Cardinals to enter the military. "We put Virginia, West Virginia and the bordering states near the entrance, but we have crosses throughout the park."

Teresa Guill, marketing manager of Cole Harley-Davidson came up with the idea to place the crosses. "We will keep the crosses up for two weeks after Let Freedom Ride 5 is over," Guill said. "We are encouraging the public to travel through the park and view the crosses." Guill also encouraged people to visit (anysoldier.com) to get more information about sending mail to military personnel. "Some of them never get a single piece of mail," she said.

For more information on Let Freedom Ride 5, check out (colehd.com).

— Contact Bill Archer at barcher@bdtonline.com

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