



# HEROES

WINTER 2018 VOL. 7

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## PHOTOS OF THE YEAR

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## 2019 EVENT SCHEDULE

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ALEX VARGAS  
NAMED 13TH  
SENATE DISTRICT'S  
VETERAN  
OF THE YEAR

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HUB  
Update

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Las Vegas  
Honor Ride

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Letters to  
Santa

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Mike's Carwash  
Raises Funds for  
Project Hero

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# PROJECT HERO

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MILITARY  
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CIRCULATION **28,095**

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Cover photo by Sydney Ray

Photo by Sydney Ray

**HEROES MAGAZINE**

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**www.PROJECTHERO.ORG**

 **We Are Project Hero**

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 **@R2RProjectHero**

# LETTER FROM THE COO



Like any good cyclist, Project Hero knows that even though we've vanquished some tough terrain on the road we've traveled, our eyes are on the road ahead.

We are excited to welcome 2019, a year that is a unique opportunity for Project Hero and our Project Hero family.

From our new Resilience Rides and Super Series that will include Century Series Rides, Haute Routes, and Gran Fondo events and new Extreme Ultra Rides and Mountain Bike events, to our popular Honor Rides and Challenges, and with greater focus on local

HUB rides, the year ahead offers new avenues on which we can ride, grow and work closer together to reinforce the effectiveness of our programs and achieve our mission.

That's precisely what we are going to do! We will continue to support our mission-critical work of elevating local HUBs, empowering veterans and first responders nationwide and helping more heroes pedal more often.

Ride safely and we wish you a prosperous, healthy and Happy New Year,

Todd

Todd Setter

Project Hero Chief Operating Officer



## EDITOR'S MESSAGE



**A**ll through the year, it is a privilege to showcase the great people and programs of Project Hero in our *HEROES* magazine.

As part of my work on the publication, throughout the year I get to enjoy the benefits of learning about all the positive things our Project Hero family is doing, and in many cases the good things people outside our organization are doing, for our Healing Heroes and communities.

It's a gift you all give me twelve months a year and during this Holiday season, as I look back on the amazing year we have shared in 2018, I am especially thankful to all of you for it.

I hope you enjoy our year-end round-up issue.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Peter Bylsma, Editor



# THANK YOU

for supporting our HEROES





# Letters to Santa

TO HAVE MY BOYS  
AND MY WIFE ALL  
TOGETHER. (AND A  
POWER METER FOR  
MY FELT FRI OR THE  
CERVELD P3) I WOULD  
LIKE A SOUND MIND,

HEALTHY BODY, LOTS  
OF LAUGHTER AND TIME  
SPENT WITH LOVED  
ONES

HECTOR  
MASTACASTILLO

Besides peace  
on earth and  
goodwill toward  
men, I want new  
components for  
my touring bike  
and a new paint  
job for my road  
bike!

Steve Hughes

I JUST WANT  
THE DOCTORS  
TO FIND OUT  
WHAT IS  
WRONG WITH  
MY BACK SO I  
CAN GET BACK

ON MY BIKE.  
SO SANTA, I  
JUST WANT  
GOOD HEALTH  
FOR 2019.

-STEVE GRAY

I'm very excited  
about Project  
Hero for 2019  
and wish all my  
friends, staff and  
sponsors a Merry  
Christmas and  
a healthy and  
Happy New Year!

Rob Paddor

All I want for  
Christmas is  
a building or  
space with a  
sign reading  
Project Hero!

valerie  
Gambino

1. Large van
2. Yoga retreat  
in Costa Rica
3. Peace on  
Earth

Ray Clark

What I would  
like for Christ-  
mas is for my  
family to be  
together and  
enjoy the day...  
some new bike  
stuff would  
be cool as well

Shawn Morelli

To have my  
cancer go  
into remission  
permanently  
and seeing  
my brothers  
and sisters  
next year on  
Challenges

Doc Mumma

I WOULD  
LOVE TO  
HAVE A  
BIKE FOR  
CHRISTMAS  
HAPPY  
HOLIDAYS

TO FRIENDS  
& THEIR  
FAMILIES

GINGER  
MERCER

A day without  
a veteran  
committing  
suicide  
Mark Weidhase





**MIKE'S CARWASH THIRD ANNUAL  
'A WASH WITH THANKS'  
RAISES MORE THAN \$14K FOR PROJECT HERO**

**M**ike's Carwash hosted their third annual 'A Wash With Thanks' fundraiser on Sunday, November 11, resulting in an amazing donation of \$14,356 to Project Hero!

In honor of Veterans Day, all 23 Mike's Carwash locations gave away free Basic Washes to veterans and active military members. Veterans were also given the option to upgrade to the Ultimate Wash for just \$5 with the proceeds donated back to Project Hero.

"A free carwash is just a small token of our appreciation to all the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces," said Mike Dahm, President of Mike's Carwash. "Thank you to all the veterans, active military members and customers who came through our locations on Sunday and

supported Project Hero with a donation."

Founded in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1948, Mike's Carwash is headquartered in Loveland, Ohio. The company is known for its state-of-the-art carwash technology, friendly customer service and its dedication to the communities it serves. Mike's has 22 locations in Evansville, Fort Wayne, Jeffersonville and Mishawaka, IN, Cincinnati and Dayton, OH, Florence and Louisville, KY.

"The outstanding support Project Hero has received from the third 'A Wash With Thanks' event will make a difference in the lives of our nation's healing heroes," said Todd Setter. "We honor, congratulate and thank Mike's Carwash and the communities that came out to support those who serve our nation and Project Hero as part of this great annual Veterans Day event." ■



# BEST PHOTOS OF 2018

This year's images represent love, laughter, brotherhood, camaraderie, strength & family — the soul of Project Hero.

A scenic view of a coastal bridge with cyclists riding across it, overlooking the ocean and cliffs. The bridge is a concrete structure with a decorative railing, supported by several pillars. The ocean is a deep blue, and the sky is clear. The cyclists are wearing colorful gear and are spread out across the bridge. The cliffs are dark and rugged, with some rocks visible in the water.

*"I've learned that people will forget what you said,  
people will forget what you did, but people will never  
forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou*

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Above: Strength comes in small packages. Students from Oceano Elementary School line the road to cheer on participants of the California Coastal Challenge.

Opposite page, top: It's always someone's birthday, and every day of the Challenge is no exception.

Opposite page, bottom: Cyclists gear up for the kick off of the Las Vegas Honor Ride.



WEAREPROJECTHERO



© Sydney E. Roy





CANDICE SNOW

Top: During the Texas Challenge, a passing school bus offers a new kind of high-five. Right: Even the youngest supporters show their fighting spirit.

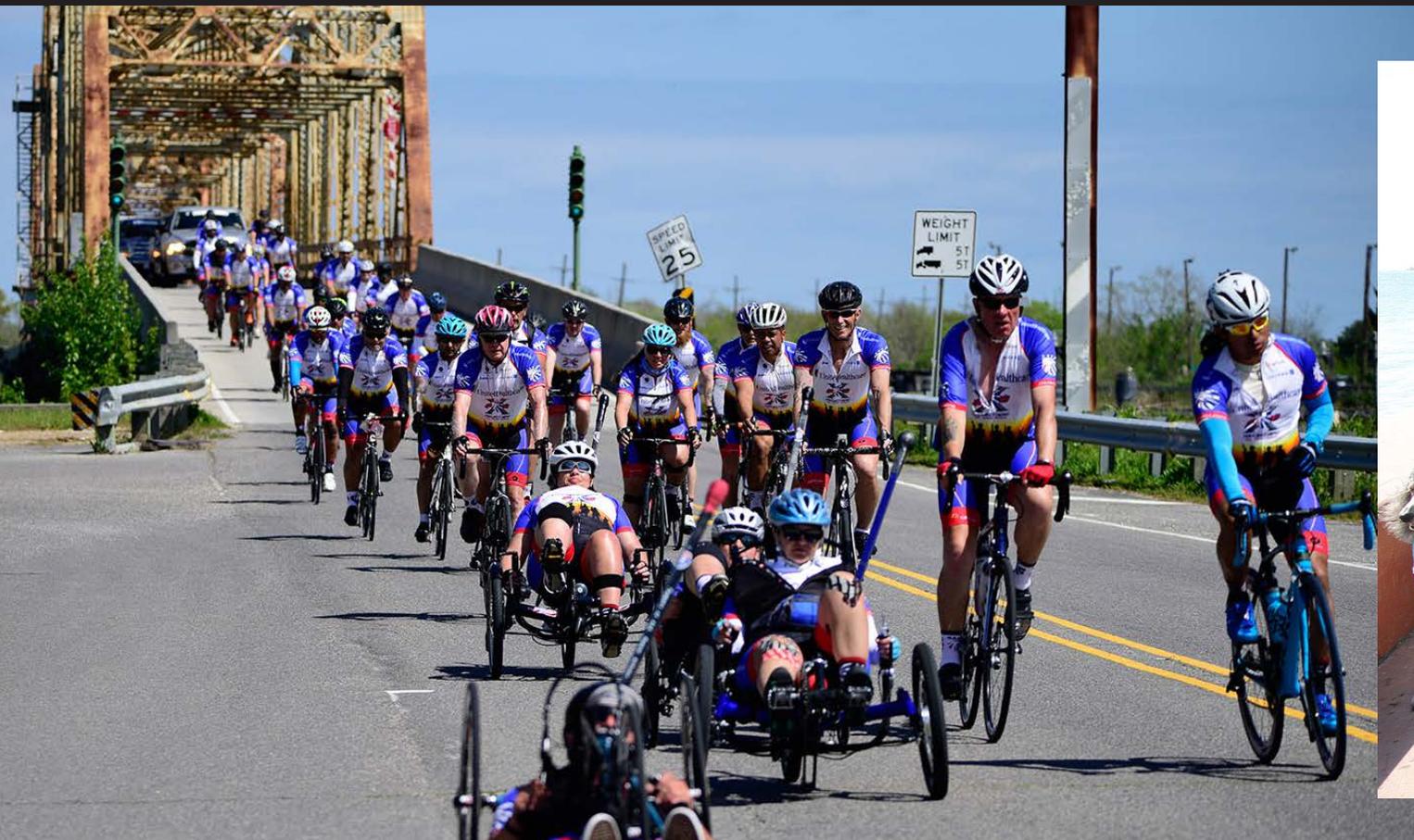


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Above: The women of the Fall Initiative show their strength.  
Left: There is no limit to the power of a bike!

Right: On the Memorial Challenge, the greatest minds think alike...in matching spandex. Below: The brotherhood of riding together is a wave of strength that is be found on wheels.





Above: You know you're at a mountain bike event in Las Vegas if you see the rubber ducky tree.  
Left: The first ever mini-challenge, the Southernmost Point Ride did not disappoint.

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Above: "Low Riders" dominated the Gulf Coast Challenge. Right: The Barrington Honor Ride & Run brought out the whole family.



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Left: The trails of Red Rock Canyon teach a cyclist that it's not about how fast you are, it's about the ride.  
Below: The California Challenge brings hope, recovery and resilience.



© E. Roy

# 2019 EVENT SCHEDULE

We are excited to announce part of our 2019 event schedule, a combination of therapy and community events of varying levels throughout the nation. Next year's lineup will continue to support our mission-critical work of elevating local HUBs, empowering veterans and first responders nationwide and helping more heroes pedal more often.

## LOCAL HUB RIDES

To elevate local and regional events planned by our HUBs, we will be adding a new section to our website featuring these opportunities. These events will allow more people to get involved and encourage other HUBs to either join if they are nearby or plan similar, unique events that provide a great balance of pushing physical limits, teamwork and healing.



## SUPER SERIES



This unique set of rides is sure to pique the interest of many of our riders and features events located throughout the country. We have partnered with various programs to create this exciting new series that will play an instrumental role in the recovery process for our participants nationwide. The 2019 Super Series will include events such as our previously impressive Century Series Rides, extraordinary Haute Routes, and prominent Gran Fondo events, with the addition of some new, exhilarating Extreme Ultra Rides and breathtaking Mountain Bike events.

# RESILIENCE RIDES/EVENTS



Our new “Resilience Rides/Events” name will encompass our existing Women’s Initiative and Mountain Bike events and allow us to build on and enhance these therapeutic programs. We are currently working on securing Women’s Initiative dates for the spring, fall and winter of 2019.

Our signature Challenge rides will still play a significant role in Project Hero’s 2019 event landscape. We will keep improving the Challenge series and ensure these events continue to provide incredible, exhilarating environments conducive to healing for participants nationwide.

# CHALLENGE RIDES



# HONOR RIDES



Our popular Honor Ride series returns for 2019 giving the Project Hero family a unique opportunity to connect with our local communities, creating a powerful and inspiring environment for all.

# HONOR RIDE TO Fabulous LAS VEGAS NEVADA



by Sydney E. Roy



**More than 700 riders enjoyed beautiful weather and great cycling at the 2018 Project Hero Las Vegas Honor Ride.**

Starting and finishing at the Clark County Government Center, the annual event raised more than \$75,000.

The event offered riders the unique opportunity to ride the famous Las Vegas Strip and enjoy great food and entertainment

after completing one of three bike-friendly Honor Ride routes through and around the city.

“We are thrilled by the great turnout and especially the support of our local sponsors,” said Jack Shepard of Project Hero. “Special thanks go to our friends from the VA and members of the Project Hero family who volunteered at the event. Everyone had a great time on a very special day for veterans.” ■





© Sydney E. Ray



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Sydney E. Ray



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# ALEX VARGAS NAMED VETERAN OF THE YEAR BY CA SENATOR HILL



**P**roject Hero is proud to celebrate Alex Vargas's contributions to our veterans and first responders and Project Hero and congratulate him on being named 2018 Veteran of the Year by California State Senator Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.

"In addition to his service in the U.S. Navy, Alex continues to honor our country and his comrades past and present through his tireless volunteer work on behalf of military veterans," said Senator Hill. "I am proud to name Alex the 13th Senate District's Veteran of the Year for 2018."

Alejandro "Alex" Vargas served in the United States Navy from 1990 to 1994 as a Hull Maintenance Technician and achieved the rank of E-4, Third Class Petty Officer. He lives in Redwood City and is medically retired due to spinal injuries. Alex has been a volunteer at the Trauma Recovery Program (TRP) at the Menlo Park VA Facility for several years and prior to his work with the TRP, he volunteered with the Recreational Therapy Program at Menlo Park and Palo Alto VA facilities and at the Valor Games Far West in support of Project Hero veterans who compete at that event.

Alex has been an avid cyclist since 2000 and has been cycling with Project Hero since the beginning of 2015.

"My main reason for riding with Project Hero is the camaraderie it



provides me with other cycling veterans," he said. "I tell people that 'I'm a disabled vet cycling bum' and when I'm coaching on a climb day, I say 'look ten feet ahead of you and it's all flat.' I tell the guys when I'm riding, 'I think of everything and nothing at the same time.' I told the Senator being on my pedals is one of my happy places. I always use that one when I explain why I cycle."

Like so many of us, Alex has realized the value of the Project Hero family. "I joined Project Hero/R2R to find other disabled vets who love to ride bikes and could relate to what I'm going through," he said. "I have a great support system through my friends and family. Yet none of them really knew what it was like to heal through cycling. I love being part of a nationwide cycling group of veterans and first responders. It opens up the pos-

sibilities of making friends all over the country and traveling to see them and for a ride. Each ride, a new adventure."

"His deep commitment to VA recreational therapy and trauma recovery programs, the efforts of Project Hero and events like the Valor Games Far West is inspiring," said Senator Hill.

"Volunteering with TRP is a great experience. It's the icing on the cake," Alex said. "I get to show the people in the program what I love about cycling along with the other amazing volunteers. We remind people about good old fun on a bike. You can ride alone or in a pack. Cycling is freedom."

Congratulations, Alex and thank you for making Project Hero look good on and off the bike! ■



### Denver HUB

Mike Turek leads the HUB and hosts rides regularly out of Wash Park. They ride twice a week from the park and on the weekends from their GE location. The Denver HUB brought 24 riders to the 2018 Las Vegas Honor Ride - a huge accomplishment since establishing in July 2017.

**What the HUB has to say:** "It's a great way to meet people and aspire to a healthier lifestyle," said Mark, who has ridden 3,000 miles this year after riding none prior to getting involved with the HUB. "I like to join folks who do what I like: cycling. There's camaraderie and fun!" said Mazuba. Darryl likes to "spend community time with vets and stay active" and for Don, our HUB is a "good way to get out of the house and do something, because I was kind of isolated." From not cycling to joining the HUB, Don has nearly 1,500 miles under his belt this year!



### Muskogee HUB

The HUB recently took part in a local community poker run to recruit new members and participated in this year's community Veterans Day parade. HUB leader Marlene Diaz hosts monthly

HUB events with HUB volunteers for riders and their families. They ride four days a week from their meet up location at the VA they lovingly call "The Locker." The summer programs were highlighted by "Bring Your Kid to Clinic Days" in which HUB riders brought their children & grandchildren, ages 8 to 16, teaching bike riding basics and some new tricks to get them pumped about cycling.

This holiday season, the HUB is also partnering with their local Salvation Army and Muskogee Area Cycling, for the third annual "Jingle Wheels" and "Veteran Angel Tree" programs.



### Ft. Hood HUB

The Ft. Hood HUB schedules 4-5 rides a week highlighted by their Sunday social 50+ miler. HUB participants recently volunteered at races as course marshals, hosted a bike maintenance

workshop, and they participated in the community Trunk-or-Treat event. Shelly Moser, the HUB leader, attended the Fall Women's Initiative with women she recruited as riders over the past year and led a daily adaptive yoga session. Jeff and Shelly Moser and the Ft. Hood HUB riders also attended this year's "Hotter than Hell 100" ride where they coordinated the meet up and provided drinks and snacks to Project Hero riders. For information, check out their Facebook group page.

**Sacramento HUB:** A very big thank you to Mark and Melissa Messa and the Performance Bike shop in Stockton for the Fuji Big-horn mountain bike donated to the HUB. Thank you to Trek Bicycle in Sacramento for the Trek Emonda that was donated to Kendra Marsh. And thank you to Jeff Larson and his team of volunteers for their hard work of securing these donations.

### Bikes4Vets

The Inland Empire HUB and Mark Weidhase have adopted the Bikes4Vets program for the City of Riverside, CA. "Bikes4Vets allows the Riverside Police Department to donate abandoned but functional bicycles to Project Hero for placement with a local veteran," said Mark.

### Chicago HUB

Jason Simon is bringing back the Chicago area HUB. If you're in the area or know someone who is, please help support his efforts and ride with him this winter. Check out the Chicago HUB on Facebook.

### Prescott HUB

The Prescott HUB is active and online now. ★

# IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

- 2019 Events Preview
- Florida Honor Ride
- HUB Holiday Highlights
- New Year's Predictions

## CONNECT WITH US!

To receive updates from Project Hero, sign up for our email newsletters at [projecthero.org](http://projecthero.org). To share your feedback on this issue, email us your full name, city and state at [info@projecthero.org](mailto:info@projecthero.org). You can also visit Facebook or Instagram @R2RProjectHero, or tweet us @R2RProjectHero. Letters chosen may be edited for length and clarity. All submissions become property of Project Hero.

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