

By John H. Vargo

# PADDLING FOR A CURE

The recent paddle down the Hudson River by three veterans had the goal of bringing attention to the terrible situation taking place amongst returning veterans to civilian life!

As Kevin Keaveny, President of the Hudson Valley Center for Veteran Reintegration said on September 25, while at the Cortlandt Yacht Club, "There have been 440 suicides of veterans since we began this trip from Lake Tear of the Clouds on September 4, 2020. One of them just recently right here in the Town of Cortlandt, which the Cortlandt Yacht club resides in!"

The problem of suicide and depression by returning veterans is being addressed by many organizations both private and governmental. Unfortunately, up to this point the problem has not been solved.

The trip began by placing the individual hand built kayaks, built by the paddlers themselves into the navigable Hudson River at the Lake Champlain locks.

From there the three veterans paddled and camped their way down to the entrance of the Champlain Canal and through the locks to Troy.

Taking a kayak through a lock is a tricky bit of business as the incoming rushing water to fill the lock makes for rough, bouncing around.

Once through the locks and entering the Hudson River at Troy, they were greeted by a 32 ft sailboat, that would be their sleeping quarters as they made their way down river to New York City.

Since paddling a kayak, in all kinds of weather conditions, made each days progress questionable as to how far they would get, preparing for the next stop became a very trying experience for Ms. Erica Prindle, the coordinator for the entire trip. What she could not have known until she made telephone calls to the next destination ahead, how wonderful the reception would be when she described the trip as being a restorative support paddled by veterans.

Big Apple Tours was their first stop in Albany, followed by Coeymans Landing Marina, 14 miles to the south. Coeymans landing Marina was very enthusiastic with Yanni's Two Restaurant providing free meals for the five men that made up the downriver contingent.



I've said this many times before, "The perspective that an individual gets while on the Hudson River is dramatically enhanced by what the individual is on, whether it is a passenger ship, speed boat or kayak."

Paddling a kayak that close to the water limits your perspective and brings only the immediate into view. You have the other two kayaks and yourself and the next bend in the "river;" that is it. These men could not have known until they were paddling on the "river" what this was going to be like until they actually did it.

That is exactly what the President of HVCVR had in mind when he created the Vets On Water trip in the first place. The veterans previous camaraderie while in the service, was again brought out in this trip; each man had to count on the other.

After Coeymans Landing Marina, every day's stop was always greeted by the marine business or boat club with honest enthusiasm and encouragement by all the people they met. Riverview Marine, Hudson River Maritime Museum, Hyde Park Marina, Marlboro Yacht Club, Newburgh Riverfront Marina and the Newburgh Rowing Club to Garrison Yacht Club to Cortlandt Yacht Club.



A word about the Hudson Valley Center for Veteran Reintegration. Mr. Gavin Walters Sr. is the Program Manager of Vet2Vet of Ulster County, an organization that is financially supported thanks to the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Project, and housed by the Center. He is also a Board Member of the Hudson Valley Center for Veteran Reintegration. When interviewed, Mr. Walters said, "We usually have 20 to 30 veterans in the programs that we offer at any one time. We are especially proud of actually saving a veteran in a recent suicide attempt!"

This wooden kayak building program, the Veterans Wooden Boat Workshop, began in 2017 when Kevin Keaveny approached Andrew Rothlien, owner of Rondout Yacht Basin on Rondout Creek, and asked for space to begin his boat building program for veterans. Andrew was very enthusiastic and provided space and support for the idea, as he still does.

By the time I met the group at the Cortlandt Yacht Club on September 25th, the Vets had pretty much gotten their show together. Cortlandt Yacht Club members were as enthusiastic about this visit as they have always been toward veterans' causes in the past.

From the Cortlandt Yacht Club the three veterans and they're accompanying sailboat paddled south to the Schattemoc Yacht Club. There they rested again overnight, took the following day off completely, and on the 27th of September paddled south along the East shore of the Hudson River to the Yonkers Paddle and Canoe Club, as they rounded the corner about a quarter mile north of the club, they could see something on the water, but could not quite figure out what it was until they got closer. It turned out to be a large group of kayakers from the Yonkers Paddle and Canoe



Members of the Yonkers Paddling and Rowing Club met up with a group of veterans with the Hudson Valley Center for Veteran Reintegration on the Hudson River. The Vets were welcomed and escorted part of the way on their epic journey as part of the Yonkers Paddle and Canoe Club 11 am member paddle. Photo by Karen King

Once at the Yonkers Paddling and Rowing Club dock, the vets were greeted by the Commodore Kevin Horbatiuk, offered a Pizza snack and then Kevin Took them to dinner.

**PLEASE SUPPORT THE  
HUDSON VALLEY CENTER FOR  
VETERAN REINTEGRATION  
300 Enterprise Dr.  
Kingston, NY 12401**

**Many of the locations that the  
vets visited did so on their trip  
down river.**

***Thanking you in Advance!***

**John H. Vargo, Publisher**

Club all waving their paddles as they came out to greet the trio.

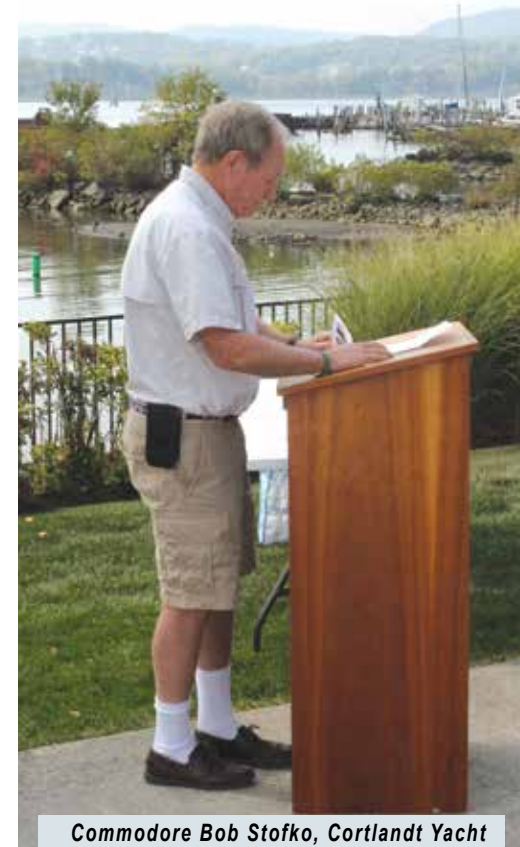
With much fanfare, smiles and congratulations, they pulled up to the Yonkers Paddle and Canoe Club dock. The members helped remove the home made kayaks from the water, and the vets spent the night in Yonkers on the accompanying sailboat.

Leaving the next morning they paddled to the Dykman Street Marina just below the George Washington Bridge. The layover there prepared them for the final stop, North Cove Marina and the adjacent Battery Park City.

The strong currents along the East shore of New York City are unlike anything they experienced from the Upper Hudson to the George Washington Bridge. What saved them is the fact the kayaks are so light that, being very careful, you can manage the currents. Unfortunately the sailboat that accompanied them right into North Cove Marina, a notoriously dangerous experience did not have it as easy and probably will never forget the experience of getting through the North Cove Marina Entrance.



**Cortlandt Yacht Club members and guests who welcomed the vets on their visit. John H. Vargo, Photos**



**Commodore Bob Stofko, Cortlandt Yacht Club, welcoming the vets and presenting them with a large check for their cause.**



**Westchester County Supervisor, George Latimer on right with other speakers and guests,**