

Greater New Orlea

Pontchartrain Yacht Club raises sails in tribute to veterans



Photographed at the 2016 Pontchartrain Yacht Club Veterans Regatta event are (L to R): Mandeville Mayor Donald Villere; We Heart Vets Co-Founder John Sutton; We Heart Vets social media contact, Stacy Harter; We Heart Vets board member, Chris Erichson; We Heart Vets board member, Anne Trawick; military veteran, Jimmy Ulfers; and military veteran, Matt Altland. *(Kara Martinez Bachman)*



By [Kara Martinez Bachman](#)

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on September 23, 2016 at 10:22 AM, updated September 23, 2016 at 10:55 PM

Stay connected to [NOLA.com](#)

x

At around 3 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 17, under cloudy, windy, misty gray skies, a half dozen or so persistent sailboats nonetheless set out for a two-hour regatta. But it wasn't an ordinary race; it was part of a day of payback for veterans who had given of themselves in acts of patriotism and sacrifice.

The [Pontchartrain Yacht Club](#) (PYC) Veterans Regatta, now in its second year, offered a day of fun and appreciation for local veterans served by two local nonprofits, We Heart Veterans and Wounded War Heroes.

Boats were launched across from PYC, but most of the activities happened onshore, on the patio under the club. Families and

veterans were treated to a day of beverages, food, live music and raffle opportunities, with proceeds benefiting the two veterans charities.

A Fire District 4 ladder truck stood nearby with flag flying, and Mandeville Mayor Donald Villere was among those present to honor local vets.

A vibrant painting in shades of red, white and blue with a retro WWII-era vintage feel was raffled. The painting was created by artist Scott Withington.

Also raffled was a trout fishing trip, donated by Andy Jones of Wicked Fishing Charters. Retired after 24 years serving with the U.S. Coast Guard, Jones said, "We're just glad to be a part of it and to give a little something back."

John Sutton of Mandeville was there organizing and fundraising on behalf of We Heart Vets, the organization he co-founded about four years ago with Marc Quiroz. The charity works mostly with housebound or limited mobility World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Gulf War vets.

"We cook them meals, take them to the doctor, make sure they're on the right meds," Sutton said. "We are an advocate for the veteran, the widow and the family."

"We try to help them and let them know they're not alone and they're not forgotten," he said. "Our main slogan is: serving those who serve."

On the day of the regatta, none of Sutton's vets were actually present, since most can't leave home because of failing health, limited mobility, age, or issues such as PTSD.

"We deal with people who haven't left their house in three years," he said.

Another beneficiary of the day's event, Wounded War Heroes, had some veterans and their families come out to enjoy the day. Collette "Cootz" Foret -- who actually drives all the way in from Thibodaux to volunteer with the Covington-based Wounded War Heroes charity -- spoke about the organization.

"They have to be at least 30 percent disabled to be a War Hero (member)," Foret said. "We have about 170 vets on our roster right now."

Foret said Wounded War Heroes' goal is to "put heroes back in the outdoors" by organizing hunting and fishing trips and other outdoor activities. The group organizes a whopping 115 outdoor events a year.

"This is the first time we've taken them sailing," she said, "and we are delighted to be a part of this."

Foret said about ten Wounded War Hero members showed up to enjoy the regatta. Turnout was lower than expected because some feared bad weather during the scheduled time. Rain drizzled intermittently and skies were gray as the sailboats took part in a light race-style procession that passed within view of the length of the Mandeville lakefront.

Since there were more participating boats from PYC members than were needed, some vessels, such as that of yachtsman and Mandeville resident Brian Keating, took to the waters with teenagers and other vet family members who had accompanied the honorees for the day's festivities.

Foret said although her father was a wounded war hero from World War II, she didn't get involved with the charity to support or acknowledge any family. She did it just because it seemed right.

"The people who deserve the most respect in this country, we don't give them that respect," she said.

Sutton started We Heart Veterans for similar reasons.

"My whole family served," he said, recounting family members who has served their country in Korea, Vietnam, and other conflicts.

Sutton himself is not a veteran, but he's served his community in a similar way, as law enforcement.

"I served under (Jefferson Parish Sheriff) Harry Lee, so I got shot at by Americans," he joked, before stressing seriously that being in the trenches in law enforcement prepared him to understand the experiences of veterans.

Sutton said he does it all as part of his simple message for veterans.

"You fought for us, now it's our turn to return the favor," he said.

More information about We Heart Vets may be found at Wehrtvets.org and details about Wounded War Heroes may be found at Woundedwarheroes.org.

Entertainment contributor Kara Martinez Bachman may be reached at karambachman@gmail.com or via Twitter, @BachmanWrites. She welcomes your news tips and story ideas.

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

© 2016 NOLA Media Group. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of NOLA Media Group.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[▶ Ad Choices](#)