

Cause for Celebration

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By Grace Marvin

News travels fast in Radcliff, Ky. When Randy Acton heard that Will Stolz, a fellow local businessman, had an idea for a Hardin County military appreciation day, it didn't take long for Acton to track Stolz down.

"I knew I wanted to be a part of it," Acton said. "I reached out to Will, and he already had the name in mind: 'Hooray for Heroes.'"

Acton and Stolz met for lunch and discussed their idea for a patriotic community event focused on giving back to veterans, military families and first responders. "It was half my vision and half Randy's," Stolz said. "We combined our ideas, and before we knew it, the entire event was planned out."

The inaugural Hooray for Heroes celebration was in 2006. For both Acton and Stolz, the growth of the event and community involvement has been remarkable.

"The crowds are growing every year," Acton said. "Seeing the size of the tents go from 20 x 20 to 40 x 120 in order to accommodate the crowds has been inspiring. Now we feed, on average, 3,000 people."

Early on, the duo decided the day was going to be about paying tribute.

"It's a free day for families, full of fun and entertainment," Acton said. The celebration is also an opportunity for the Fort Knox community to say thank you.

"We tell Korean War vets and Vietnam vets that we appreciate them," Stolz said. "The ones that maybe didn't get a thank you when they returned home."

That's what keeps community volunteers showing up year after year.

"People show up so eagerly," Acton said. "They want to shake hands with soldiers and say thank you face-to-face. Hooray for Heroes gives them that chance."

(Below) Volunteer Pam DeRoache serves up the event's traditional lunch at Hooray for Heroes in 2015.



How to Plan a Great Community Event:

The organizers of the Fort Knox region's Hooray for Heroes event told America's Defense Communities their top tips for a successful military appreciation event.

1. Make it a passion project. Hooray for Heroes is in its 12th year. Acton and Stolz attribute much of the event's success to having chosen a cause their community was already passionate about. "In our community, no matter where you walk, you see people in uniform," Stolz said. "It gives us a sense of pride to know these people are serving and have served all around the world."
 2. Pull together an all-star team. Look to community members who share the same passion but have different skill sets. "We gathered a committee of like-minded citizens who were energized about the same goal," Acton said.
 3. (Fund)Raise the roof. Cast a wide net for support. "We haven't found it difficult to raise money for Hooray for Heroes, because the event is so entrenched in the community," Acton said. "All types of local businesses pitch in." He said financial support comes even easier once you "determine the what, when, where of your event." —GM
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