

Chris Carney:

CROSS-COUNTRY BIKING TO HELP WOUNDED SOLDIERS

By Karen Amster-Young

Chris Carney's favorite vacation destination is the Cayman Islands. This year, however, he is embarking on another kind of journey—biking across the country to raise money in a fundraising effort to benefit the non-profit Wounded Warrior Project. "Soldier Ride," the 4,200-mile journey will begin in Montauk on August 17 and end in San Francisco. Soldier Ride began in East Hampton as an effort to help American soldiers, who have been badly injured in the line of fire. Carney wants to raise awareness of the organization, and at least one million dollars.

The Wounded Warrior Project is a program of VetsFirst, a division of the United Spinal Association, a veteran service and disability rights organization that seeks to help men and women of the armed forces, who have been severely injured during military conflicts around the world. The project is headed by John Melia, a dedicated former soldier, who was brutally wounded in Somalia.

Carney lives and works in the Hamptons. He is a local rugby player, bartender and mason. He loves the water, which may explain why the Cayman Islands are a favorite vacation spot. But instead, he has been riding 40-50 miles per day training for this effort. "In July, I started mixing it up a bit," Carney explains. "I am also riding longer distances now—about 75-85 miles. In August, I'll taper off a little before the trip." Local bike shop experts from Cycle Path have been supporting Carney throughout his training. "I was pretty clueless at the beginning," he says. "Now, I am on my way. I think if I ride conservatively, I will be all right. Pace is not as important as consistency."

Carney came up with the idea for Soldier Ride while talking to a friend after meeting a few wounded servicemen in the area. However, he credits men from Amagansett's legendary music club, The Stephen Talkhouse, for getting the project off the ground. "Peter Honerkamp, Nick Kraus,



Chris Carney, from Montauk to San Francisco



Dennis Long and Reg Cornelia from Stephen Talkhouse really made this thing take off," Carney explains.

Early in the process, he visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., a comprehensive health-care facility for more than 150,000 soldiers, other service members, family members and retirees. It was this visit that solidified his determination to make Soldier Ride happen. "Once we went to Walter Reed, met some of the wounded soldiers and really saw what the Wounded Warrior Project was all about, we were not only humbled, but inspired," adds Carney.

"We tried to raise money at first with some concerts, but netted very little after expenses. It wasn't until after the hospital visit that Soldier Ride came to life and we began to see that we can truly raise a good deal of awareness and money—if we all put our efforts toward this one cross-country journey." There have been local fund-raisers and parties over the last few months, but it has all been about building awareness of Carney's cross-country effort. So far, \$45,000 has been raised toward the Soldier Ride effort.

"I have my own feelings about the war, but this effort is apolitical," says Carney. "We have people from both sides of the fence supporting this effort—Democrats and Republicans working together. Once you meet a 19-year-old without legs, you can't argue politics with anyone willing to help." There are over 4,000 severely wounded servicemen and women, who have been injured in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Soldier Ride is personally funding this project and Carney has promised to donate no less than 80 percent of all money raised from the ride. "It will go directly to the soldiers and their families," he says. It will also help purchase wounded warrior backpacks that are given to the soldiers when they arrive at American hospitals. These packs are filled with clothing, toiletries, a CD player, and other personal items. Ultimately, they are hoping to raise enough funds to provide job placement services for wounded soldiers. "I hope people realize how important this is," says Carney. "We can all make a difference."

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To make a pledge for Chris Carney or for information about **Soldier Ride**, call or go to:

www.soldieride.com
631-267-3142 (Stephen Talkhouse)
The Wounded Warrior Project
www.unitedspinal.org

Hamplon Event at Stephen Talkhouse
Actors will read from fiction pieces that have appeared in *The New Yorker*.
Fiction Live Benefit for Iraq Veterans:
7pm
\$20 www.ticketweb.com
631-267-2540