

HONORING OUR TROOPS ON THE TRAILS



BY LINDSEY FONTAINE

It's Monday morning in the Snowmobile Capital of the World and the Eagle River Derby track and grounds are shrouded in a calm quiet far different than the loud yells of race fans and symphony of highly tuned engines that occupied it less than 24 hours ago for the World Championship Snowmobile Derby. However, upon walking into the expo hall it is quickly realized that it truly isn't that dissimilar. The invited members of our state's military participating in this year's 6th Annual Honor Our Troops Military Appreciation Ride are gathered within, and it is easy to sense feelings of anticipation and excitement.

Over coffee and donuts, Colonel Don Hamilton, one of the founders of the ride, addressed the group and offered a brief history of the event along with an overview of what the day would bring. For the majority of the 65 riders, it was their first time participating in the ride. Upon being broken into three groups based on riding experience, everyone moved outside to be paired with their sleds.

With the temperature at a warm and welcome 20 degrees, everyone gathered for the yearly group photo and then broke off to hit the trails. Aside from the advanced group, riders traversed over about 15 miles of pristine trails before stopping into Bauer's Dam Resort for a quick warm up and some hot cocoa.

From there we crossed Lower Buckatabon Lake and began to wind our way through the Vilas County Forest. The trails were tightly surrounded by tall jack pines, hemlock, spruce and a wide variety of other trees native to this part of the state. Snow clung heavy to branches like a t-shirt does your chest on a humid summer day, and the landscape looked untouched and serene. As we continued our journey east, we rolled up and down hills and navigated sharp yet exhilarating corners. Before we knew it we had reached Sayner, where we'd head into the Sayner Pub for a buffet-style lunch of chili, salad, chicken sandwiches and pizza.

Our bellies full and the spirit of comradery abounding, groups once again disbanded on the various routes leading them back to Eagle River. The intermediate group made several stops along the way, the first being at the Funny Farms Fishery, where everyone



A brief stop along the trail.

