



Support our Veterans

» On September 28th, at the Town of Whitehall, Delawareans came together to celebrate the contribution of our military in the community. Organized by volunteers of Delaware's 22in22 initiative, nearly 2,000 civilians, veterans, students and active duty military gathered to reflect on the needs of various veteran groups. Proceeds from the day were used to afford veteran support organizations the opportunity to connect with attendees and \$50,000 was donated to nonprofit, Stop Soldier Suicide.

This year's focus was on Delaware's Gold Star families, who were the Grand

Marshalls in the Town of Whitehall's parade. Chase Bank helped organizers reflect on the 22 Delawareans who died in combat as a result of 9/11 by sponsoring the *Remembering Our Fallen* memorial and exhibit. Over 5,200 of the nation's 7,000 fallen were spotlighted on the memorial and Delaware's 22 combat fatalities and victims of PTSD were represented. Veteran suicide was a focus of the day.

According to Brian DiSabatino, CEO of EDiS Company and chief organizer of the event, volunteers worked for months putting this 4th annual Vet Fest

into place. The State Chamber's Military Affairs Committee members were on hand during the planning and scores of their employees filled the streets of Whitehall. Delmarva Power's bucket trucks draping flags over the event was one of many examples of business community support for the day.

"What we have seen with Vet Fest is the Delaware Way. Civilians joining with military, business leaders joining with motorcycle clubs, 100-year-old veterans joining with elementary school children. What happened on the ground at Vet Fest was simply amazing," said DiSabatino.

At left: WWII veterans were honored, including this veteran, Corporal Robert Austin, a Delawarean who fought in the Pacific Theater.

DiSabatino's son, Jacob DiSabatino, started 22in22 in 2015 while he was a junior at St. Mark's High School as a way to draw awareness to the epidemic of veteran suicide. The initiative asks participants to create an activity for 22 straight days, to raise awareness about the epidemic via the #22adayis22toomany hashtag, while collecting donations. Now a senior at The Citadel, Jacob chose Stop Soldier Suicide as his partner. Together, they've raised \$100,000 in Delaware and \$150,000 nationally to date. Delaware Tech is one of many organizations that participates by running their own 22in22 campaign during September, Suicide Awareness Month.

The day started with a motorcycle rally that rumbled to life at Minquadales Station 22 and ended at Whitehall's Mapleton Square. Community members then began the second annual 5K Run and 10K Ruck along the C&D Canal. Runners wore military branch colors and carried the names of friends and family who were killed as a result of military service. Then the parade took center stage. Led by Delaware's Gold Star Families and the Ferko String Band of Philadelphia, the parade featured community groups like the Imagination Players, the First State Military Drill Team, the Boy Scouts of America, the Delaware Military Academy Marching Band and the Fralinger String Band. Jeeps rolled down the street with WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans escorted by local



A crowd of nearly 2,000 attended Vet Fest at the Town of Whitehall



Brian DiSabatino, CEO of EDiS Company, organized this 4th annual affair with the support of dozens of volunteers and corporate sponsors.

families and students.

DiSabatino wanted Delaware State Chamber members to know that, "Because of your support, we were able to bring the civilian and military communities together for a brilliant and

compassionate day. Our military families are sacrificing more than we can know, allowing us to go about our civilian businesses. It is our turn to help. Vet Fest has become a beacon of hope and we are very grateful."