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Event honors Oley Valley grad; also aids wounded-soldier nonprofit

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A long line of motorcycles joined the "Never Give Up Memorial Cruise" on Saturday in memory of Petty Officer Lance Vaccaro, a Navy SEAL and Berks County native who died in a 2008 parachute training accident.

A 1990 Oley Valley High School graduate, Vaccaro was 35 when he died. He served 12 years as a SEAL.

"This (the rally) is great," said his father, Joseph, who grew up in Reading but now lives in Virginia.

"Lance was a super guy," he said. "It (being a SEAL) was what he wanted to do."

The bikers started rolling in at noon at Classic Harley-Davidson on Route 183 in Bern Township, and at 4 several dozen began a procession down Route 183 and then out Route 12 to the Temple Playground, where they were joined by dozens more for food and entertainment that included the Fabulous Greaseband.

Keith Bender, Vaccaro's cousin and a Navy veteran, said that despite the three years since the accident it's still hard to believe Vaccaro died because of its suddenness.

"I don't think there's a day I don't think of him," Bender said.

Proceeds of the cruise will go to the nonprofit Quality of Life Plus, a two-year-old California-based nonprofit that creates advanced prosthetics for wounded soldiers

Christine L. Vaccaro, Lance's mother, said she chose the group for contributions after she heard of its work during a memorial bike ride to Alaska a year ago.

"I thought it was really appropriate," she said. "We'll make this an annual event."

Quality of Life Plus - its website is www.qlplus.org - runs a laboratory at California Polytechnical Institute, matching private donations with students, engineers and professors who donate their time to tackle specific needs, said Mark Donald, a former SEAL and now the nonprofit's military and veteran liaison.

In its two years, the lab has created nine successful products and is working on 15 more.

For instance, Donald said, the government had given three prosthetic limbs to a special forces soldier who lost a leg below the knee: one for running, one for swimming and one for keeping his special forces assignment.

But soldiers can't take time out to change legs to fit the task, and the lab came up with one prosthetic limb that does all three jobs.

"We spend \$1 million to train these guys, and then in one incident they're gone," Donald said.

But the lab's work will help keep that experience rolling, he said.

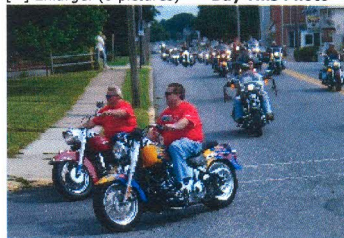
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Bob Umberger, left, of Reading and Jim Hartman, front, the event's organizer, lead a line of motorcyclists from Kutztown Road into the Temple Playground on Saturday during the Never Give Up Memorial Cruise.

Ben Hasty on Facebook



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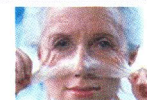
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 **Marcia Kulp** Jun 19

Thank you, Kristen, for stepping up to the plate and helping me photograph this historic event for Quality of Life Plus, the Vaccaro family, and in memory of all our veterans who proudly served this country!

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