

## Motorcycle riders pay tribute to fallen Maple Grove soldier

by Jeffrey Borowicz

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There's a saying among motorcycle riders that "Loud pipes save lives."

Well, last Saturday morning in Maple Grove it could be said that those who ride bikes with loud pipes also honor American soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

Saturday, Sept. 8, marked the fourth consecutive year that the Tribute To The Troops motorcycle riders traveled to homes throughout the state of Minnesota honoring families that have lost loved ones while fighting for our freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan.

More than 70 riders, many riding Harley-Davidsons and clad in leather, made a stop at the home of Dave and Betsy Turcotte on Pineview Lane in Maple Grove to honor Sgt. Nicholas "Nick" Turcotte, who died Dec. 4, 2006, in Iraq. Turcotte's death was the result of a vehicle rollover crash that did not involve hostile enemy action.

The Tribute To The Troops riders is a similar organization to that of the Minnesota Patriot Guard, which had dozens of members attend Turcotte's funeral last year to provide support to the family. This past weekend, three separate Tribute To The Troops rides were set up around the state on Friday and Saturday, culminating with a benefit concert Sunday at the Medina Entertainment Center.

In all, the riders visited 18 families in all parts of the state, including Lake City, Willmar, Red Lake Falls, Beardsley, Rollag, Frazee and in and around the Twin Cities. During the last four years, the Tribute To The Troops riders have visited more than 50 families that have lost loved ones killed while serving our country.

According to the Web site, [tributetothetroops.org](http://tributetothetroops.org), the Tribute To The Troops ride and benefit concert is a way of showing the families of fallen soldiers that ordinary



Debra Moore, mother of fallen U.S. soldier Sgt. Nicholas "Nick" Turcotte of Maple Grove, receives a hug from Tribute To The Troops co-founder Rockie Lynne during a ceremony Saturday, Sept. 8. More than 70 motorcycle riders made a stop at the home of Dave and Betsy Turcotte, Nick's grandparents, on Pineview Lane in Maple Grove to honor Nick Turcotte, who died Dec. 4, 2006, while serving in Iraq. Photos by Bob Forder

Americans from all walks of life care about them, are aware of their loss, and wish to acknowledge the sacrifice they and their beloved hero made for our country.

The Turcottes are Nick's grandparents and they raised him during his high school years at Maple Grove Senior High. Nick's wife, Jennifer, also lived with the Turcottes when Nick was stationed in Iraq.

Nick's mother, Debra Moore, also flew in from Colorado to be at Saturday's ceremony.

Dave Turcotte said the family is doing "pretty well" since the tragedy by keeping busy with a number of events in Nick's honor, including a memorial dedication in Elk River. However, he said Saturday's ceremony was very special.

"It means a lot to our family to know that there are people who really didn't know Nick at all that want to make sure that he's not forgotten," Dave Turcotte said. "The display [of motorcycles and riders] was pretty special. We were surprised how many riders showed up."

Dave's wife, Betsy, was also touched by the compassion of the riders.

"It's wonderful to see that many people who care about the military," said Betsy. "And they really do care. They really mean what they're doing. We got hugs from every single one of them. You see these big guys with tears in their eyes so you know it's not just for show. They feel that they just cannot do enough for the families."



Motorcycle riders from the Tribute To The Troops organization line street outside the home of Dave and Betsy Turcotte in Maple Grove as they honor the Turcotte's grandson, Sgt. Nick Turcotte, who died last December while serving in Iraq. More than 70 riders visited the Turcotte family. "We got hugs from every single one of them," said Nick's grandmother Betsy Turcotte.

Greg Schmitt and country music artist Rockie Lynne, who are co-founders of the Minneapolis-based Tribute To The Troops, were both on hand to present a plaque to the Turcotte family.

"These visits are always emotional; there's great sadness knowing these people have endured a loss of a loved one serving our country and preserving our freedoms," said Schmitt. "But there's also a joy. If we can, through our efforts, for a moment bring a little light to a mother or grandmother's heart, bring light where

there's darkness, bring happiness where there's been nothing but pain, to show a family they are not alone, then all our efforts are worthwhile."

Commenting on the Web site, defenselink.mil, Lynne said meeting families who have lost their son or daughter, husband or wife, mother or father, "will change you for the rest of your life. The sense of loss on those people's faces is so powerful. It makes you want to do something. You'll never take our freedom for granted again."

The plaque with Sgt. Nick Turcotte's photo and this inscription was presented to Turcotte's family:

"The Tribute To The Troops Ride and Benefit Concert is dedicated to those brave soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. Our focus is to gratefully and graciously demonstrate to loved ones left behind that we, as ordinary Americans, will not forget their loss. It is in their memory and honor that we raise awareness and funds for the benefit and comfort of those who continue to serve. It is through these efforts we convey our gratefulness and appreciation to all veterans who have served, whether in war, or in peace."

Schmitt said he is often asked to try to describe what a Tribute To The Troops visit is like. He says words are not adequate to describe the emotions. "If you were there, you know. You cannot decipher in words the feeling you get from being there," he said.

Betsy Turcotte said it is difficult for her family to put into words the lift provided to their hearts by the Tribute To The Troops riders.

"Knowing so many strangers care enough about our Nicholas and the others lost to give up three days of their family time for our families ... they are truly special people," she said.

"These families, they thank us and they thank us over and over again," said Schmitt. "It's the least we can do."

For more information on the Tribute To The Troops riders, visit [www.tributetothetroops.org](http://www.tributetothetroops.org).