

Veterans: Groups wishing to participate in ride are welcome to sign up

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program and an expo involving information booths for veterans and their families

McGee said several businesses will have booths alongside those from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies

The convoy will travel south along Bunce Road before turning left at Raeford Road and then making a right at Robeson Street before arriving at the museum, McGee said. Cumberland County deputies will provide an escort.

"If you can't ride but you see us, honk your horn and just wave," McGee said. "Show your support."

The celebration will be the first for Iraq veterans in Fayetteville and one of the few for cities across the nation.

St. Louis is the only major U.S. city to have hosted a welcome home parade for Iraq vets. Its organizers told the Associated Press the event drew an estimated 100,000 observers and 20,000 participants Jan. 28.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a 200,000-member nonprofit for veterans of the two wars, has been pushing for parades in America's largest cities to

RIDE TO FREEDOM

The ride is an eight-mile convoy to honor Iraq War veterans. It will begin at the John D. Fuller Recreation Center, 6627 Old Bunce Road, around noon Saturday and travel to the Airborne & Special Operations Museum in downtown Fayetteville. Before the convoy, there will be a program and expo at the rec center for veterans and their families. Doors open at 9 a.m., the program starts at 11 a.m.

recognize veterans

The Pentagon has opposed such plans, preferring to wait until the war in Afghanistan has ended.

Jason Hansman is membership director for IAVA. He deployed out of Fort Bragg to Iraq in 2004. He said the Ride to Freedom was an interesting idea.

Hansman applauded the group's efforts and said it was part of a "groundswell of support" for Iraq War veterans rising across the nation.

More than 20,000 people, including vet-

erans, have signed a petition on the IAVA website supporting a national day of action, Hansman said, and cities like Richmond, Va., and San Antonio have planned parades in the coming weeks.

"It's about more than just parades," Hansman said. "It's more about spotlighting the veterans and what they go through when they get home."

Another event in March also will honor veterans.

The Pinehurst St. Patrick's Day parade will honor Iraq War veterans with "A Tribute to the Armed Forces," said parade Chairman Alan Riley, who owns Dugan's Pub in downtown Pinehurst.

Riley said veterans groups and the 82nd All-American Chorus will be involved in the March 17 event.

"The military is always welcome here," Riley said. "We wanted to do something to show that."

Any groups interested in participating in the parade can still do so if they apply before March 10, Riley said. Applications can be found at vopnc.org.

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