

Three cheers: Support for the vet

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Two readers wanted to pass along their kind words for the support shown to returning veteran Tyler Southern.

This community is a military town, so the show of support is no surprise.

Still, it is heartwarming to read these e-mails from two readers:

- C.L. Harper wrote: "I was privileged to be among the thousands who lined the streets on Friday to greet Marine Cpl. Tyler Southern for his brief homecoming.

"This handsome young hero of a military family is only in Jacksonville for a couple of days to celebrate his 21st birthday before going back to Walter Reed Army Medical Center for months of extensive therapy and rehabilitation.

"Tyler lost both legs and right arm, yet still had a big smile of appreciation for those there to honor him!

"Everyone was there: motorcycle groups, Marines and other military, police (who did a great job with their escort), news media, plus thousands of flag-waving well-wishers just wanting to pay their respects to this wounded hero. Some had come many miles to be there."

- Kelly Prothero wrote this: "I would like to take a moment to rave about the outpouring of support shown by the Jacksonville community. My husband and I had the honor of participating in the ride to welcome home Cpl. Tyler Southern.

"I would like to thank all of the folks who made this happen, including the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and the motor officers, the Florida Highway Patrol, Adamec Harley-Davidson, Jacksonville Harley Owners Group, Orange Park Harley Owners Group, Rolling Thunder, the Blue Knights, the firefighters, the motorcycling community and the city of Jacksonville.

"It was awe inspiring when we exited the highway and saw the men, women and children lining Old St. Augustine Road to his parents' home to welcome this young man home.

"Most of all, I would like to thank Southern for his service and allowing us the honor of escorting him home."

Back-to-school help

BEAM - Beaches Emergency Assistance Ministry - has been around for 25 years, so long that a lot of people probably have started to take it for granted.

They shouldn't.

BEAM does a tremendous amount of good for struggling residents of the Beaches communities.

For example, more than 1,100 children from 394 families were helped during its recent 17th annual "back-to-school" event.

The young people were given backpacks, school supplies and clothing; they got books, food and school physicals. All were free, as were the haircuts given to those who wanted them.

This had to be a Herculean task. In fact, according to a news release, 412 volunteers worked on the project, beginning in February.

Five were singled out for special praise by BEAM Executive Director Vivian Southwell: volunteers Sherry Chaney, Sue Glawe and Virginia Macted, plus staffers Kathy Maloney and Kay Morgan.

Back-to-school expenses are always a burden on low-income families - and probably more so now, during this deep recession.

Let's all express our gratitude to BEAM officials and, more importantly, step forward to volunteer our own time for some of the organization's projects.

Defenders pick Shirk

Matt Shirk of Jacksonville has been elected secretary of the Florida Public Defender Association.

At 37, Shirk is the youngest serving public defender in Florida, reports a news release from the association.

It speaks well of Shirk, who took office less than two years ago.

More importantly, it speaks well of Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville. Shirk graduated from there, second in his class, in 1999.

Florida Coastal students have long excelled in competition with students of other law schools; one of its teams reached the semifinals in a recent moot court competition.

Now, it's evident that the school's graduates are prepared to excel in the legal profession.