

KNOXVILLE, TN. MEDAL OF HONOR

An honor to serve heroes

KNS 6/16/2014

■ Convention starts program for supporters

By Les Neuhaus

Special to the News-Sentinel

A program for area East Tennessee residents to support the approaching Medal of Honor Convention is being implemented in early July, according to organizers of the annual gathering.

Joe Thompson, co-chairman of the convention, said thousands of people approached him and co-chairman counterpart Chris Coyne about wanting to get involved with the highly anticipated conference, which will take place Sept. 10-13.

Officially, the plan will be called the Medal of Honor Supporter Program and will launch on July 4 through the Medal of Honor Knoxville website.

"The genesis for the supporter program really came about because we had so many people asking us how they could contribute to the convention, whether it was

volunteering, donating money, whatever," Thompson said on Friday. "So we developed the idea for people to get involved."

He said hundreds of volunteers have stepped forward to offer their services during the convention. However, there were so many people wanting to volunteer that they had to close that program down, as they may not even be able to use all of the people listed so far.

Coyne, a retired Air Force chief master sergeant who served 27 years in the military, echoed Thompson's sentiments.

"We put the website out there for volunteers," Coyne said. "We've gotten something like 300 so far and had to stop that because we have more than we probably need. In a nutshell, the supporter program is something for the average person to help out and be a part of the convention."

He said the supporter program is meant to showcase Knoxville as a community that supports the convention. For those people who want to hold

a flag, contribute a financial sponsor package or just voice their message of support via a video that can be uploaded through the website and showcased throughout convention location sites, the supporter program is a way to show Knoxville's patriotic support.

"There's no place quite like Knoxville when it comes to support for our veterans," Coyne said.

The financial burden of hosting the Medal of Honor Convention rests on the organizers, but both Thompson and Coyne said they have had massive help from the Medal of Honor Society, the Medal of Honor Foundation, and from various national and local corporate sponsors. And there are many in-kind donations from local supporters, Coyne said.

That said, they are still looking for donations and emphasized that for those who won't be able to physically be able to participate in helping out at the convention, lending a hand financially is a great way to help.

For more information, visit <http://www.moh-knoxville.com/>.