



Community must step up to fund veterans' cemetery

By Dan Presser, Guest commentary

Posted: 11/07/15

We, the veterans of Monterey County, would like to take this opportunity to thank the long list of elected and appointed officials and their staffs who have labored for more than 20 years to bring about the dream of the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery. From McPherson to Laird to Farr and Monning and many others along the way, their efforts have finally born fruit. We are now constructing Phase I of our cemetery. In some quarters there seems to be a misconception about where we are and what is still needed. We hope this information can dispel some of the myths.

Phase I of the cemetery is merely the first of what will be 11 phases before the cemetery is complete. This first phase includes a road and infrastructure within the grounds, administrative and maintenance buildings and, most importantly, the columbaria containing 5,000 niches for cremated remains.

What it does not contain is the ability to accept full casket burials for those who, for personal or religious reasons, cannot be cremated. It is anticipated that this omission will be remedied in Phase II, which is now being designed by the California Department of Veteran Affairs. Phase II and the remaining nine phases have not yet been paid for. Each phase will require a 10 percent local match of funds, oversight costs to the state and funding of an endowment to provide for the long-term maintenance and operation of the facility. Because the design has not been completed for Phase II and beyond, there is no anticipated cost for those phases. Therefore, there is no way to know exactly what the local share will be, but it will be in the millions, not thousands, of dollars. Absent any further funding from the state, the local community will be required to provide those funds.

There is one mechanism in place to provide a substantial boost to the necessary funds. There is a parcel of land adjacent to the cemetery site which has been set aside to be sold to any developer with the proceeds going directly to the California Central Coast Veteran Cemetery Foundation. Without

the sale of that parcel we will need to raise even more funds. It always comes down to money. For this reason, local veteran organizations, supportive companies, individuals and others who believe that the local veteran population needs and deserves this resting place, continue to work to contribute to the foundation. Our fundraisers include such events as the Honor Our Fallen run organized by Margo Stengel and the annual Heroes' Open golf tournament conducted by the United Veterans Council of Monterey County. All profits from these events are directly turned over to the foundation. The Scottish Military Society has been a supporter for many years and continues to donate each year. All of these people who work hard for a cause they believe in should be celebrated for the efforts.

However, given the daunting amount of money left to raise, it is essential that the entire community, both personal and business, step up with everything they can afford; not all at once, but continually every year as we work toward the completion of each phase. The men and women who will be interred at this cemetery will come from the veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan and other conflicts too numerous to mention. These veterans have defended your country and your way of life. This small cemetery on a tiny patch of land seems a trivial price to pay for those who have given so much. Our cemetery will include veterans from the entire Central Coast giving them a dedicated military resting place where they will be with their comrades in arms.

The Central Coast Veterans Cemetery needs your help. Donate to the United Veterans Council or directly to the Cemetery Foundation by going to UVC-MC.com.

Our Central Coast veterans stood up for you; now you can show your pride by standing up for them.

Dan Presser is owner of FourWinds Travel in Carmel.