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Vista's Darlene Garrahy, Tri-City Health Care District trustee, just returned

Request to install memorial denied

Vietnam vet, San Dieguito High grad is 'disappointed'

ADAM KAYE
STAFF WRITER

ENCINITAS — A Vietnam veteran from San Dieguito High School's class of 1959 is "very disappointed" that officials have denied his request to erect a war memorial at the Encinitas school.

David Gonzalez of Cardiff and two other local veterans

have launched the San Dieguito War Memorial Project to build a memorial for San Dieguito High School alumni killed in the Vietnam War.

The school on Santa Fe Drive is now called San Dieguito Academy.

A San Dieguito Union

High School District administrator said he told Gonzalez this week that the campus was not an appropriate place for a war memorial.

"We just felt the kids who attend the academy would not have any positive connection with these individuals,"

Assistant Superintendent Eric Hall said of the veterans.

The district superintendent and the San Dieguito Academy principal shared in the decision, he said.

Hall described Gonzalez's request as "informal," and one that the veterans still can

present to the district's board of trustees.

School board President Barbara Groth, herself a graduate of San Dieguito High School, said Thursday that she was unaware of Gonza-

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lez's proposal and declined to comment on the matter.

Gonzalez said he envisions a stone monument fitted with brass war scenes and the names of at least five San Dieguito High graduates he has

identified as killed in action. He would like it placed in the school's center courtyard, known in his day as the "senior lawn."

A public park or gathering place would be a better place for the memorial, Hall said. "It seems to me that fallen comrades might want to be respected by more people than kids on a school campus," he said.

Joining Gonzalez in his attempt to build the memorial are Sam Hernandez of Encinitas and Bill Roebuck of Oceanside.

William Wetzel, commander of American Legion Post No. 416 in Encinitas, is a San Dieguito High School graduate and Vietnam veteran. He criticized the decision by school officials.

"How can they say no?" he said. "These were kids who went to that school and they died fighting for their country."

To raise funds for the memorial, Gonzalez has organized a benefit golf tournament scheduled for Saturday at Oceanside's Center City Golf Course and a luncheon the same day at Tony's Jacal

restaurant in Solana Beach.

The alumni identified by Gonzalez as killed in Vietnam are: Marine 1st Lt. James M. Mitchell of Encinitas; Navy Lt. j.g. Michael R. Zerbe of Del Mar; and former Solana Beach residents Marine 1st Lt. Charles B. Henricks, Army Spc. 4 Victor Lopez and Army Pfc. Thomas L. Mericantante.

To build the memorial is to

keep a vow Gonzalez made to himself to honor his fallen friends.

"I'm very sensitive about this issue," he said. "I promised Jimmy and Mike I would do something."

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