

Academy board changes war memorial policy

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FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

ENCINITAS — It was only one word, but it meant a lot to the San Dieguito Veterans Memorial group, which is leading the effort to have a war memorial built at San Dieguito Academy to honor former students killed in military action.

During an academy board of directors meeting Thursday evening, David Gonzales, the veterans group president, opposed the word 'graduated' in the draft policy that specified memorials should only recognize graduates of district schools. The opposition won out as the board later agreed that the name of anyone who attended a district school and was subsequently killed in military action was eligible for placement on a memorial.

A policy proposed last

month stated that the memorial would not recognize students who only attended the district high school but did not graduate from it, or graduated from another high school. Gonzales, as well as four other veterans who attended the meeting, opposed that part of the policy.

"My friend, Lt.j.g. Michael Zerbe, and I went to school from the third grade to the 10th grade and then he left for another school," said an emotional Gonzales. "He was killed in 1966 in Vietnam and he's still there. The government let him down. I don't want to let him down by leaving his name off the memorial."

Jordy Lievers, a La Costa Canyon High School student member of the board, listened to Gonzales and recommended that any student who attended any San Dieguito school and were later killed in action should be honored.

"I think that by seeing all of the names listed would bring this memorial closer to home," she said. "To add more names would really make a bigger impact."

The board unanimously agreed and changed the wording of the policy.

"I don't feel that we need to make any distinction as to whether they graduated from this area or not," said board member Barbara Groth. "This memorial is really about us remembering them."

The veteran's group has uncovered the names of six community members who died in Vietnam and eight who died in World War II. It is still looking for names of those who died in Korea.

The board will now establish a committee to review the memorial's design, materials and placement. The committee will include a student, a staff member, a school admin-

istrator as well as a business services administrator from the school district office and a parent.

The committee will then meet with representatives from the group proposing the memorial and may also consult with a district architect.

The San Dieguito Veterans Memorial group must now raise funds to pay for the project, which would be an obelisk with the names of students killed in Vietnam on one of its four sides while the other sides would recognize students killed in other wars. Gonzales said hopes to see the memorial finished by Memorial Day 2003.

"We're so happy that they listened to us," said Gonzales about the change to the policy. "I just want to move forward and honor these guys who gave their lives for us. I don't want to let any of them down."