

Vets work to honor the fallen

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BY KARA M. BLANCHARD

ENCINITAS - With the passing of another Memorial Day, one group's vision to pay tribute to lost friends and soldiers may become a visual reality in the future.

To ensure that their high school classmates and alumni who fell in combat will not be forgotten, the San Dieguito High School Veterans Group is planning to build a memorial at the high school to honor former students killed in the nation's wars and conflicts.

The monument would commemorate World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Grenada and possibly others.

"They should be remembered at the school; it would be respectful," said sophomore Kati Miller.

The honorary monument is in the beginning stages of design, but it may take the shape of a five-foot granite obelisk.

"Our veterans need to be remembered and not only on one day or two days out of the

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Memorial

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year, but every single day out of the year...hundreds of thousands of Americans have given their lives so I can do what I want here," said Michael Sterling, a night teacher at San Dieguito High School.

The idea for the memorial has been with Dave Gonzales, Veteran group leader, since 1989. He attended his 30-year high school reunion and learned of the death of classmate Navy Lt. Michael Zerbe, who died in a helicopter crash in Vietnam.

Gonzales, a veteran himself, said that the war "hit me pretty close," and he doesn't plan on leaving anybody behind.

He also lost his cousin, who was shot down in 1963 and identified 33 years later and another friend and classmate, Marine 1st Lt. James Mitchell, was also killed in action. Gonzales made a promise to himself that he would not let anyone forget them.

It would be more than a memorial of remembrance; it would serve to encourage patriotism and the sacrifices made for American's freedom. The

country was draped in red white and blue after September 11, but now it seems to Gonzales that the patriotism is fading.

The students will be reminded everyday of that spirit and the reality that students their own age lost their lives to war and they may be called to do the same thing, Gonzales said.

"It's not on their mind until something happens, there will be other wars and history does repeat itself," he said.

The Veterans are raising funds for the project with bi-annual golf tournaments and recruiting contributions from school alumni - and to date have raised \$9,000 of the necessary \$15,000 to build it.

They hope to have it erected by Memorial Day of 2003 or Veterans Day 2003.

They also plan to give voice and vision to history and current events by setting up a network of veterans to speak at schools. Survivors with first hand accounts would be accessible to students to bring the events into focus.

Lending voice to passive textbook accounts of war and atrocities, through verbal accounts, which are parts of his-

tory that are usually never handed down.

"There is nothing but respect from all of the kids, they think it's a great project and they are our biggest supporters," Gonzales said.

Support became "obvious" through letters and phone calls to the group from citizens and support from the students at the school district meetings.

"I think it's a fantastic idea and practically every school should have one," Sterling said.

"I don't think it's a daily public sentiment and it should be," he said.

Miller supports the memorial and said that it would help to bridge a gap that exists between reading about these events and the actual reality and people behind them.

"It's hard to think...that people losing their lives and going to war are our friends or parents and it was actually people from our school that went to fight for us," she said.

The veterans group can be reached by mail at the following address: San Dieguito High School Veterans, PO Box 230178, Encinitas, CA 92023 or e-mail gonzales@csusm.edu.