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Veterans Honor Courtyard: A place for reflection, repose, and remembrance

BY JEANNE FERRIS

Around 1994, former Solana Beach Mayor and council member Tere Renteria was approached by the Mexican American soldiers who met once a month for lunch at Tony's Jacal restaurant. They asked if she would represent them at a city council meeting with the intent to create a Veterans Memorial for the Mexican Americans from Eden Gardens who had served in the military. Renteria said she would help but that everyone from Solana Beach who had served should be honored as well. Council agreed and the plan moved forward.

Joe Olson, now deceased and husband of former Solana Beach council member and Mayor Celine Olson, was instrumental in getting the memorial project off the ground. This city-approved memorial exists in the park today.

In 2012, Renteria presented the idea to enhance the memorial at another council meeting and, this time, requested it to be a cornerstone site. She was surprised to find that improvements in the La Colonia Park Master Plan in-

cluded an enhanced version already incorporated within it. However, funding had been put on hold due to the city not being allowed to keep Redevelopment funds for projects like this. Renteria suggested forming a committee with the purpose of fundraising. The city was receptive and appointed Lesa Heebner and Mike Nichols from the council as its ad hoc committee to assist Renteria and her community volunteers.

"We need to raise approximately \$200,000 before we can contract this project out for bids," Renteria said. "The city of Solana Beach and especially the city council ad hoc committee have been instrumental in assisting our group in getting us to this point. They have now given our funding committee the sole responsibility of raising the money to bring the Veterans Honor Courtyard to fruition.

"It's important to remember to pay tribute to those who gave of themselves for America, the greatest country on earth," Renteria added. "Our troops wrote a blank check payable to the United States of America for an amount of 'up to and including my life.'"

"According to Chuckles Hernandez, a long-time community activist, there were over 100 individuals that have served from Eden Gardens alone and something the Mexican community is very proud of," said Renteria. "Only a few that served in WWII are still alive today."

Commemorative tiles will be available for a tax-deductible donation of \$300 each on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, at 11 a.m. at La Colonia Park in Solana Beach. These tiles will be placed within the proposed Veterans Honor Courtyard for people to visit in reflection, repose and in remembrance of citizen soldiers. An architectural rendering of the proposed memorial will be on display for attendees to view.

Local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 5431 and Commander Randy Treadway will lead Solana Beach in celebrating Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies, which are free and open to the public. These ceremonies feature music from the Santa Fe Christian Band, the Young Marines Color Guard and the ceremonial release of white doves following the traditional sounding of Taps. Light refreshments will be served.