

## **Establishing a Veterans Cemetery at the Former Fort Ord**

### **Information about the Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery Foundation**

**2011**

The former Fort Ord served as an active military installation for nearly a century and embodies a history of considerable local and national military significance. Nearly 25 years ago, a group of veterans representing all branches of military service began a mission to honor all veterans by establishing a national Veterans Cemetery on the Central Coast.

In 1991, with the announcement of Fort Ord closure, an important opportunity surfaced to create a final resting place for veterans and their spouses. A 178 acre site was set aside in the 1997 Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) Base Reuse Plan for a veterans' cemetery east of General Jim Moore Boulevard and bounded by Parker Flats Road and Parker Flats Cutoff.

Because a federal cemetery exists within 100 miles of the former Fort Ord (the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in Gustine), the US Department of Veterans Affairs determined that its authority to grant funds to design/build a cemetery was limited to a California Department of Veterans Affairs operated facility. This determination required the State to agree to operate and manage such a facility.

In 2006, then State Assemblymember John Laird sponsored successful former Fort Ord cemetery legislation that included terms for an estimated \$3.5 million maintenance and operations endowment to be funded prior to beginning cemetery design/construction. A Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) was formed under the Monterey County Department of Military and Veteran Affairs in June 2007 to advocate for and move the project forward.

To fund the endowment, a non-profit organization, the Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery Foundation (CCVCF), was formed and has now raised over \$200,000.

A conceptual cemetery draft Master Plan was prepared in September 2008, funded by Monterey County and the Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA). The Master Plan defines in-ground burial and cremation columbaria, a Wall of Honor, Memorial Hall, non-denominational chapel, military/veteran history museum, amphitheater, and public walkways, benches and landscaped areas. The plan also includes definition of areas for habitat restoration, recreational facilities, and residential and commercial development to help support the endowment. A copy of the proposed cemetery master plan can be found on the Foundation's website at [www.ccvcf.com](http://www.ccvcf.com).

The cemetery will be located primarily within property boundaries of the City of Seaside once the land is transferred from the Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) and verification of munitions cleanup is achieved. 78 acres of the cemetery site have been deemed clear and can be used immediately for cemetery design and construction, providing advance funding for design and construction can be secured.

In 2009, the City of Seaside, on behalf of the City and County of Monterey (which currently also holds a portion of the cemetery property within its boundaries), issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit purchasers for a portion of the overall cemetery site. Uses such as residential or a related private cemetery were envisioned, with proceeds from a purchase to be used to capitalize the cemetery endowment. Although no purchaser emerged during the RFP period, the City and County have since remained open to talking with potentially-interested users.

To help move the project even further, Assemblymember William Monning sponsored AB 1757 which became law in September, 2010. Passage of this legislation shortened the cemetery design and construction process by allowing cemetery full design to proceed while permitting phasing of the construction and endowment funding requirements (in contrast to requiring the entire endowment funding to be in place prior to design or construction).

Also in September 2010, the City of Seaside and the County of Monterey received another inquiry about the property and entered into an Exclusive Negotiations Agreement (ENA) with a potential developer for land adjacent to 78 acres of the cemetery site. If this proposed development moves forward, a portion of proceeds from sale of that land (a segment called the "endowment parcel") includes full funding for the required cemetery endowment.

In October 2010, HR 3219, the Veterans Benefit Act of 2010 passed Congress and was signed by the President. Among many items in this new law is an increase in certain burial and funeral allowances, including an increase in the amount of plot allowances for veterans' cemeteries from \$300 to \$700 effective October 2011. The Act must still receive actual funding allocations in the federal budget, but if funding for the increased plot allowance is provided, it is estimated that the required endowment for the Central Coast Veterans' Cemetery could be reduced from \$3.4 million to approximately \$1.25 million. This reduction could mean that the cemetery project moves forward much more quickly.

Further good news was achieved in September, 2011 when AB629, sponsored by Assemblyman William (Bill) Monning, was signed into law by now-Governor Jerry Brown allowing FORA to act on behalf of the California Department of Veteran Affairs (CDVA) to design and construct the Veterans Cemetery. This may reduce design and construction cost and can further speed the Federal construction funding process.

Also in September, 2011, FORA, Monterey County, the City of Seaside, and the Veterans Cemetery Foundation entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which confirms the commitment of the parties to work together to design, fund and construct the Veterans Cemetery. A next step for the parties is to designate and transfer title of the cemetery property to either CDVA or the Foundation.

While these steps may seem tedious, each step brings closer the reality that we will finally and actually have the Veterans Cemetery here on the Central Coast within the next few years.

The Central Coast Veterans Cemetery Foundation remains committed to raise endowment funds and is currently in discussion with representatives of the California Department of Veteran Affairs, the Fort Ord Reuse Authority, and with local jurisdictions to identify how the cemetery can continue to progress even more rapidly.

Clearly, funding is a critical piece of the equation and support from the community is essential!

As soon as committed funding of approximately \$1.5 million can be identified and obtained, allocations for final design of the cemetery can be included in the state and federal budgets --- and construction of the cemetery can then be completed within the following 2 years. Each year that design funding is not included in the state and federal budgets is at least one year of additional delay for final approval and construction.

The Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery at Fort Ord will provide a place of final rest for members of all branches of the military and their spouses. A site marker noting the location of the future cemetery was unveiled at the site in March 2010. The marker serves as a call to the

community to join in the effort to honor all veterans who have served and defended our nation over many years and generations.

To obtain more information about the cemetery or make a contribution supporting this effort, please contact the Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery Foundation at P.O. Box 849, Marina CA 93955, send an email to [info@ccvcf.com](mailto:info@ccvcf.com) , or visit the Foundation's website at [www.ccvcf.com](http://www.ccvcf.com) .

We appreciate your interest and thank you for honoring and caring about our nation's Veterans.