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Veterans Memorial may be on move

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The structure stands 55 feet high and weighs in at more than 40,000 pounds. Thousands see it every day on their way in and out of Cape Coral.

But in about a year, the 38-year-old Veterans Memorial, honoring those who served in the military and seen by 48,000 drivers daily at the city's eastern entrance near the Cape Coral Bridge, could be moved.

The triangular spire in Cape Coral Parkway's median near Del Prado Boulevard faces removal to make way for faster traffic flow along the parkway.

"If it has to be moved, it has to be moved, you can't stop progress," said Bob Rieser, a veteran and past commander of Cape Coral's American Legion Post 90. "We would want it moved respectfully to an honorable place."

The memorial looks like a large see-through tepee reaching to the sky, braced by four concrete poles weighing 10,000 pounds each. It straddles the median over a fountain added during a later beautification program.

Aluminum chevrons connect the poles and sit at the apex. They represent the four U.S. armed service branches.

A brass plaque reads "Veterans Marker." It dedicates the monument to all troops who served or are serving.

"I'm a veteran and I didn't know that was what it is," said Lewis Lower, 73, a Korean War veteran. "I thought the memorial was the Iwo Jima memorial."

Cape Coral's Community Redevelopment Agency, which is studying ways to cut traffic congestion during morning and evening rush hours, supports moving the memorial to make way for six lanes of traffic, instead of four, on that section of the parkway.

"We may have to move it unless we can find another way around it," said Robert Greco, a board member. "I think we should get more input, especially from veterans, about it."

One veteran, David Deaton, 48, a Marine in the 1980s, had a few conditions he would like to see met.

"It depends on where it is moved to. I'd have to see the plan," Deaton said. "It would have to be visible



Jack Hardman, special to news-press.com

Traffic passes by the Veterans Memorial along Cape Coral Parkway Friday in Cape Coral. The memorial might have to be moved to accommodate a road-widening project.

CAPE CORAL VETERANS MEMORIAL FAST FACTS

- Location: In the Cape Coral Parkway's median to the east of Del Prado Boulevard
- Composition: Four prestressed, high-tension concrete poles angled in pyramid shape
- Height: 55 feet
- Weight: each pole, 10,000 pounds
- Base: Each pole 17 inches in diameter
- Peak: 9 inches square holding up four heavy gauge aluminum chevron shapes representing the four U.S. military branches: Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines

Veterans Memorial timeline

- February 1968: Veterans and organizers begin collecting donations in earnest for what is called at different times, the Cape Coral "Veterans Arch," "Veterans Marker," "Community Memorial Marker" or "War Memorial Marker." The memorial was to honor veterans of all wars.
- March 1968: About 100 volunteers including veterans canvas the Cape for donations
- September 1968: Construction permit issued
- Dec. 7, 1968: On the 27th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, a ground-breaking ceremony takes place for the memorial in the median of Cape Coral Parkway east of Del Prado Boulevard
- April 24, 1969: Retired Army Maj. Gen. Bruce Easley selected as dedication speaker
- May 3, 1969: Veterans Memorial dedicated.
- January 2000: GreensCape volunteers, under the direction of Carolyn Conant of Cape Coral, meet to discuss beautifying the median and downtown. A fountain for the memorial's base is planned. Robert Greco, an owner of ACRA

from the road. I want people to see it. I don't want it hidden away. I'd like people to be able to walk to it."

Other veterans repeated Deaton's sentiment.

"If you put it in a proper spot where people can see it and recognize the contributions of veterans, then it can be moved," said Ed Carny, 73, commander of the Cape's Harney Point Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8463.

"If it is in a park where people can walk up to it that would be good."

Don Heisler, a redevelopment board member, suggested placing the memorial at Bernie Braden Park next to the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce Building and at the foot of the bridge, about a half-mile east of the current location.

"There are three places I can think of: Bernie Braden Park, Four Freedoms Park and near the Iwo Jima memorial (at Four Mile Cove Eco park)," Heisler said. "But we have to hear from veterans about it."

Proposals are to expand Cape Coral Parkway to three lanes in each direction from Coronado Parkway to a yet-to-be-determined point to the east of Del Prado. The plan could go to City Council for approval in September, said Steve Neff, city transportation manager.

No cost estimates for moving the memorial exist, he said.

"We don't even know if it can be moved," Heisler said. "It is made of concrete. We might have to replace it with another one."

That's not what Greco wants to hear. His family business, ACURA Electric, had its 25th anniversary in 2000. To celebrate, he refurbished the weather-worn memorial and put spotlights through it.

The addition of a fountain by the GreensCape Volunteers completed the memorial for dedication on Veterans Day 2000.

"Some stranger just called me up and said, 'Hey, why don't you put lights on it?'" Greco said. "It sounded like a good thing to do."

Electric, decides to add lights to the monument to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Greco's family-owned business.

- Nov. 11, 2000: Veterans Day, the ACRA Electric refurbished Veterans Memorial with a fountain is dedicated
- July 10, 2007: Moving the Veterans Memorial and eliminating the median is proposed by the Community Redevelopment Agency as part of a plan to improve traffic flow.

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