



Healing Field organizers lack funds to purchase new flags for memorial



Written by

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The names of the 30 members of the U.S. military killed last week when their helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan will be added to the list of those who are annually honored in a Cathedral City memorial dedicated to those who have died while serving in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

It's an unfortunate situation in and of itself.

But for organizers of the Healing Field at Patriot Park, the number of fatalities in Afghanistan and Iraq are growing faster than they can raise money to buy the American flags to represent each person in the annual event, which takes place Nov. 6-13 this year.

Although 5,876 people died through 2010, there were only 4,200 flags available.

Each flag measures 3 feet by 5 feet and attached to an 8-foot flagpoles that is then pushed into the ground.

Casualties have reached 6,212, to date, but the number of flags remains the same as it did a year ago — a 2,012 flag deficit.

"It's hard to believe that with all those flags you see, it still isn't enough," said Indio resident Ellie Gordon, 60, who has visited the Healing Field every year since it began in 2006.

Each flag costs \$20, which means organizers need to raise \$40,240 if they want to have a flag for each person.

Donors contributed \$10,000 for this year's memorial, but half of that needs to go toward other expenses, including lights, said Cathedral City City Councilman Greg Pettis, who is this year's Healing Field chairman.

Organizers will meet later this month to discuss fundraising options, and the

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councilman is “very confident” they will find a solution.

“The people of the valley are very generous, and I believe they will step up and show their support for the brave men and women who gave their lives,” Pettis said.

He added there's plenty of space for extra flags, since Patriot Park and the adjacent area around the Cathedral City Public Library can fit 9,000 flags.

Meanwhile, organizers need to worry about vandalism and flag thefts — issues that plague the Healing Field every year.

Last year, charred remains of a burned flag were discovered behind the Postal Connection, 69-115 Ramon Road, about a mile north of the park at Date Palm and Dinah Shore drives.

Two other flags were crumpled up and another was hung upside down.

Healing Field organizers last year said it was the worst series of vandalism to hit the memorial since it was first held.

Volunteers who were guarding the memorial one morning saw a teenager untie a flag, but he dropped it and ran off before they could stop him.

A local security company offered to guard the Healing Field at night this year, but day coverage has yet to be planned, Pettis said.

He wouldn't say which security company volunteered.

As much as Gordon wants to have enough flags for each soldier, she also understands, she said, the higher number would increase the need for security.

“There would be more flags for vandals to mess with,” she said.

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