

Supporters of Native American monument seek unlikely connection

South Korean defense attaché is wooed as a potential donor for a \$4 million sculpture.

A group working to erect a monument to Native American veterans at the Riverside National Cemetery gathered Friday to woo a seemingly unlikely potential donor: Maj. Gen. Shin Kyong-soo, defense attaché for South Korea.



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"I'm a soldier," Shin said. "As a soldier, it is always great to have a chance to respect the veter-

rans. We need to put more focus on the Native Indian contribution for the country and for peace and for Korea."

In San Pedro on Saturday, Shin awarded medals to U.S. veterans who served in the Korean War. That event was hosted by the American Indian Alaska Native Veterans Memorial Committee. Shin is good friends with Don Loudner, commander of the National American Indian Veterans. Loudner also is a member of the monument committee.

He and the group took advantage of Shin's visit - the general works out of the South Korean Consulate in Washington, D.C. - to pitch their proposal and ask him to contribute.

It's the latest move in a renewed effort to get the \$4 million monument built. Plans for the memorial, designed by Baxter Miller, a Corona landscape architect, were unveiled seven years ago. The project was approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs but needs funding.

"We had some momentum," said Miller, who designed two other monuments at the cemetery, "and then the recession hit."

After several years of little or no action, the effort was revived in early 2015.

Committee member Sharron Savage said the group has raised more



TERRY PIERSON, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

South Korean defense attaché Maj. Gen. Shin Kyong-soo with a model that could be used for an Indian monument at Riverside National Cemetery.

than \$500,000, and she is hopeful the rest will come this year. She said the group has generated interest at tribal conventions in recent months and has been encouraged by the attention of a number of large companies, including Microsoft. The Sycuan and Soboba tribes recently made donations, she said.

"We're getting to be well-known," Savage said.

The memorial would be the latest in a series of monuments at the cemetery. The first honored Medal of Honor recipients. That was followed by a veterans memorial and one for POWs/MIAs.

Cemetery director Peter Young said the monuments make the cemetery distinct.

"At Abe Lincoln we had some," Young said of the national cemetery near Chicago where he was stationed before coming to Riverside in 2014. "But they were small ones."

Only Arlington National Cemetery has the kind of monuments Riverside does, he said.

"I think they add a lot," Young said. "They make it more than just a burial ground."

The monument would occupy the

perimeter of the lower lake at the entrance of the cemetery. A central structure on the south side of the lake would have a low-stone circular perimeter with a series of openings. Those openings would serve as sight lines connecting with tribal markers set up around the lake. A 12-foot statue of an Indian draped in an American flag would stand at the center of the central monument.

Colorado-based sculptor Thomas Shomberg, who created the figure of boxer Rocky Balboa that stands at the entrance of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, had a small version of the Indian statue on display at the Friday meeting.

"This will be the first and only memorial for the American Indian veteran," Shomberg told Shin. "Nobody has done this before. We just want to try to recognize, with gratitude, their contribution."

Shin said he could not commit to any contribution, but he said he thought the memorial should be built.

"I think this will be very meaningful," he said.

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