Tempe vets memorial to boast simple design

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You won't find an elaborate artillery display at Tempe's planned veterans memorial. Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, the power of the piece comes from its simplicity.

The design, which will greet visitors to the future transportation center at Fifth Street and College Avenue, is symbolic. Five stainless-steel plates, representing the five branches of the military, protect a central crystal that represents our American spirit and virtues. At night, colored light will shine through the crystal and past the plates to illuminate the darkness.

The idea that veterans protect something so fragile and beautiful really speaks to Linda Riegel, a 48-year-old Army reservist and ASU's director of parking and transit services, who helped choose the design with four other community members.

With $100,000 in seed money from the city, the group is ramping up efforts to raise an estimated $900,000 to build the memorial. They plan to show the design at a meeting tonight and at other community events this summer.

Today, Pop Quiz talks with Riegel about the importance of honoring veterans.

It took your group only a few meetings to choose the design. How did you make a decision so fast?

Once we saw the recommended proposal, we knew that was it. We wanted a veterans memorial, not one to any particular war. We wanted it to be timeless, something that honors service and sacrifice. But what kind of emblem represents that? It's not guns or tanks. This design seemed to best capture that.

The city could lump this memorial into the cost of the transportation center. Why go to the community to raise funds instead?

This memorial is supposed to be from the people, for the people. We plan to advertise in the city water bills and at public events. We're also meeting with several community organizations, corporations and Native American groups. Of the ones we've presented to, there's been an outpouring of support. Everybody seems to love the design.

James Carreno/The Arizona Republic

Army reservist Linda Riegel helped choose the design for Tempe's planned veterans memorial.

You've spent half your life in the military. What does being a veteran mean to you?

It's part of who I am. I've spent 26 years in the military: 13 active, 13 in the reserves. I could've retired when I finished my 20th year, but I enjoy the service to my country.

There are plenty of people here or abroad like that, who are willing to defend the ideals of this nation. It's kind of like, you're never an ex-Marine. You're always a veteran.

Is that what you hope residents see in this memorial?

Yes. And that freedom's not free. We should honor every single serviceperson in the military, whether they've fought in a war or not. If people want to support our troops, a good way would be to make a donation to build this memorial.

Find out more about the memorial — and the future transportation center, which will be a hub for light rail, buses and pedestrians — at 6 tonight at Pyle Adult Recreation Center, 655 E. Southern Ave.