

Published November 7th, 2012

Proposed Veterans' Memorial Garden at SMC to Honor War Vets and Families

By *Sophie Braccini*

Max Crowell checks the garden's spot. Photo Sophie Braccini-

Like many young people, Saint Mary's College (SMC) students Max Crowell and Alex Dulwick want to leave their mark on the campus. The two students are not afraid to dream big and don't let difficulty bog them down. Their project is to build a beautiful and significant Veterans' Memorial Garden in a prominent location on campus, but they need to raise \$80,000 to do it.

The idea came to Crowell after he joined the SMC Republican Club in 2011. Crowell had two grandfathers who served in the military during World War II and his father fought in Vietnam; he felt that despite the three commemorative plaques that exist on the campus, he wanted a more prominent place to show support for those who served in the military.

He and Dulwick talked to the SMC facilities staff at the end of their sophomore year, and were told it was a "great idea," but still weren't given a location. Upon returning in the fall, Crowell and Dulwick went back to the facilities staff twice.

After months of presentations and discussions, the two ended up acquiring a centrally-located area on campus where students, faculty, and staff walk by every day, right

off the main arcade. "Imagine a 4.6-foot stone Obelisk in the middle of a patio with plants and benches for respite and reflection," said Crowell, pointing at a large expanse of grass across from the dining hall. "This place was covered in knee-high ivy and was nicknamed 'the swamp' because it floods in winter. Alex and I cleared everything and removed dying trees, with the help of SMC's veterans; this was the first step of our project."

Saint Mary's College has many ties with the U.S. military - from those alumni who have served to its use as a pilot training school during the 1940s. Each side of the tall, four-sided narrow tapering monument will hold a plaque commemorating the different affiliations. "One will recognize those students who have lost their lives serving our country; one will remind us of Saint Mary's past as a Navy Pre-Flight school during 1942-46; one will represent the families linked to the college who lost someone in a war; and the fourth will highlight the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) graduates," said Crowell.

Crowell and Dulwick are now engaged in the most crucial part of their project: fund raising. "SMC veterans and alumni have already expressed their interest and started contributing to the project," said Crowell. The students also contacted local service groups, and had no difficulty finding supporters.

One of the first was Moraga Kiwanis. "Graig Crossley, Barry Behr and I decided to support a project that we found worthwhile and appropriate," said veteran and Kiwanis member John Haffner. "We've met with the veteran's group on campus several times this year and Brother Glenn Bolton, their advisor. Max (Crowell) is scheduled, I believe, to talk to our Kiwanis Club in the near future."

The landscape architect who donated his time to design the project is equally enthusiastic. "My father is a veteran," said Steve Lambert of Garden Lights Landscape Design in Orinda. "This is one of the reasons I support this project. I've enjoyed meeting the two students on campus and designing a site that will match the college's character, will add to its beauty and will be meaningful." The stone patio will require the installation of a completely new drainage system, the planting of many new shrubs and trees, and will be low-maintenance.

"We are very grateful to the college for its decision to give us the 7,000-square-foot centrally-located area on campus," said Crowell. "The scenic patio that will be built here will remain a meaningful feature of the campus."

While the students are still far away from achieving their fundraising goal, Crowell - who is a senior this year - is undaunted. "I would love to see the garden finished by the time I graduate this spring," he said.

For more information about the project, visit www.stmarys-ca.edu/veterans-memorial-garden.

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