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## \$48,000 needed for statues to honor vets

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Frank Dethlefsen and the rest of the Tribute to a Soldier Committee have a large task ahead of them.

In the next four months they need to raise \$48,000 to fulfill their goal of paying a special tribute to soldiers and veterans in Cape Coral.

The committee formed after two local artists approached the Cape Coral Community Foundation with an idea to create two life-sized bronze sculptures as a memorial to those who have served in the armed forces. Members hope to have the statues built in the Memorial Area of Four Mile Cove Ecological Preserve in Cape Coral by Veterans Day on Nov. 11.

"It commemorates every service in every war," said Rich Behn, co-chair of the committee. Behn is a retired admiral with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The statues — a boy holding a soccer ball in one hand and saluting the flag with the other, standing next to a soldier saluting the flag — have been created. But they sit at a refinery in Sarasota waiting for the rest of the money to be paid before the bronzing is finished. So far, \$7,000 has been paid. The total project will cost about \$55,000.

A few local businesses, including Paradise Tiki Hut, have helped help raise funds for the project, but the committee still needs more help.

"It's not just about a couple of statues," said Dethlefsen, 48, chair of the committee and a U.S. Army veteran. "It's a window of opportunity to create an awareness in the community about our past, present and future veterans."

Members of the committee are visiting businesses and organizations in Cape Coral to ask for donations.

"We all have veterans in our lives, and they're only celebrated on holidays and that's not right," Dethlefsen said.

Paradise Tiki Hut general manager Cindy Roepke said the restaurant will host a number of events to help the committee reach its goal.

Events began with a two-week period in June where veterans could come to the eatery and share their stories and war memorabilia with the crowd. Fundraisers, including a crab race competition and live and silent auction, will continue through Nov. 4.

Roepke's father and grandfather served in the armed forces. Her 17-year-old daughter hopes to enlist in the U.S. Air Force.

"If everybody would give us \$1, it would help us reach our goal," said Roepke, 47. "People are still out there fighting for our freedom every day. I don't think a lot of people realize (soldiers) are laying in dirt so we can go home at night."