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Statue fundraising efforts nearly done

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The goal was \$48,000, and eight months later, the Tribute to a Soldier fundraising campaign is almost there.

With that money accumulated through donations, the Cape Coral Community Foundation committee will be able to place statues honoring the military in the Memorial Area of Four Mile Cove Ecological Preserve in Cape Coral.

Two local artists, Rudy Diaz and Danny Pardo, created the life-sized sculptures, which depict a soldier saluting the American flag and a child, soccer ball in hand, following suit.

So far, the committee has about 95 percent of the funds needed to complete the project.

Cape Coral City Council will discuss a proposal to move the statues at a workshop meeting Monday.

The members will vote on the proposal Oct. 19.

Diaz, 69, said the idea came from his own childhood experiences growing up in Algeria as a French citizen.

He was a child during World War II, a war in which both his father and grandfather were soldiers.

For Diaz, the small boy represents children past and present thankful for protection — just as he was thankful to the Americans for protecting France during World War II.

“I know what the people are going through today in Iraq,” he said.

Likewise, Frank Dethlefsen, chairman of the Tribute to a Soldier Committee, decided to get involved with the project because he felt a connection with what the statue represents.

Dethlefsen grew up in Germany and recalls playing at the Berlin Wall, where American soldiers were stationed to guard the border.

“That little boy was me, as it was Rudy,” Dethlefsen said of the statue.

Right now, the statue is being bronzed in Sarasota. The Tribute to a Soldier Committee intends to have it up at Four Mile Cove Ecological Preserve by Veterans Day, Nov. 11.

The statue is important, Dethlefsen said, because so many people can relate to it, whether they’ve served in the military themselves, or have military ties through family and friends.

“It hits home with everybody,” he said.

The foundation also is selling pavers — that will be placed by the statues — for \$500 each to help with the fundraising.