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Big donations save Veterans Day parade

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The Northbay Veterans Day Parade, in jeopardy of being canceled because of city funding cutbacks, apparently has been saved — thanks primarily to donations from a longtime Sonoma County business and a developer planning to build a new shopping center in Petaluma.

Earlier this week, Steve Kemmerle, American Legion post commander, said the parade was in danger of being called off this year because of Petaluma's budget constraints and the American Legion Post No. 28's inability to foot the bill.

City officials had said they could no longer afford police overtime and other expenses associated with the parade and told the American Legion it would need to come up with about \$12,500 to cover the cost of having one sergeant, six officers and others to handle various services at the Nov. 11 event.

But on Wednesday, Friedman Brothers, the home improvement center that got its start in Petaluma in 1946, announced it would contribute \$6,250. And today, Merlone Geier Partners pledged \$7,500. The firm is proposing to build Deer Creek Village, a shopping center on North McDowell Boulevard across from the hospital and south of Rainier Avenue.

Another local business, HobbyTown USA, told Kemmerle it would donate 10 percent of its military model sales to the American Legion in support of the parade. "I also plan to coordinate donations and additional fund-raisers with the model building community," said HobbyTown's Steven Elliott.

"The veterans parade is on," said Kemmerle, who has organized the event the last five years. "Additional donations will cover planes, a Huey (helicopter), advertising and other expenses."

Kemmerle received about a dozen phone calls Wednesday from parade supporters, some of whom offered money to help pay for the cost. He received e-mails from others.

In the past, parade organizers obtained city permits for the parade, banners, the use of Walnut Park and police and public works services, all at no cost. Several weeks ago, Kemmerle received a bill from the city for \$12,500 that must be paid before the parade is permitted.

"Due to budget cuts, the city is charging everybody," said Kemmerle. "The city has no extra money and has used its reserves, so we've been told we'll have to pay."

The Northbay Veterans Day Parade is the largest of its kind in Northern California and attracts up to 7,000 spectators. This year marks the parade's 20th anniversary.

Anyone wishing to contribute to the cost of the parade may send donations to: American Legion Post. 28, P.O. Box 618, Petaluma 94953.

— Argus-Courier
