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Petaluma Veterans Day parade back on, thanks to donors

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Mark your calendars. The Veterans Day parade in Petaluma is on for Nov. 11.

Organizers have raised enough money in just two days to offset the city's tab for police and public services, unexpected costs that threatened to sideline Sonoma County's only Veterans Day parade.

A \$7,500 donation from a San Francisco developer Thursday put American Legion Post No. 28 over the top for the \$12,500 city officials said was not in the budget to assist the veterans as in past years. Several other supporters also have pledged money that should help cover an additional \$4,500 in costs organizers plan for each year.

"We're amazed at the support and definitely appreciate the donations," said Steve Kemmerle, the parade's chief organizer. "The parade's on, there's no question."

The latest benefactor was Merlone Geier Partners, the developer proposing Deer Creek Village, a shopping center planned on North McDowell Boulevard.

The donation was made to assist an important event for both the community and veterans, said Greg Geertsen, a partner in the company.

"I was just surprised that it happened to that organization. They're the ones that should be funded," he said.

That the Deer Creek project still needs city approval was not the motivation for the developer's donation, Geertsen said.

"There's going to be some people who think there's something behind this," he said. "There's a lot of people that are going to benefit from this and that's what it's all about."

The other major donation was \$6,250 from Friedman Brothers, the home improvement center that began in Petaluma in 1946. Friedman Brothers has been seeking a move back into the city.

Parade organizers will take what funding they can, particularly since they had little time to raise donations after receiving the city's bill just two weeks ago, Kemmerle said.

"If they want to give us some money, we're going to take it," he said.

And fund raising for the parade isn't done.

Several other supporters have pledged. But the American Legion must continue to bring in donations because its costs are up fourfold if the city continues to charge for public services needed to stage the parade, he said.

"It's an ongoing thing. Now we have a much bigger bill," Kemmerle said.

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