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## ST LUCIE COUNTY

# Statewide Iraq and Afghanistan veterans memorial will be built in Port St. Lucie



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PORT ST. LUCIE — The city has been selected from among more than 50 locations across the state for a new war memorial honoring Floridians who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the Iraq and Afghanistan War Memorial Foundation announced.

The monument will be built in Veterans Memorial Park, and could be completed by early 2024, according to Steve Udovich, founder of the Iraq and Afghanistan War Memorial Foundation, a nonprofit in Dunedin.

The 6-foot-tall, 15-foot-wide memorial will be made from India black granite, and join other war memorials in the park such as the Vietnam Veterans Wall, World War II Memorial, Korean War Memorial, Purple Heart Memorial and Gold Star Families Memorial.

"This is unique. There's no other monument like it in the state," Udovich said.

Veterans Memorial Park is at 2100 SE Veterans Memorial Parkway.

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## **Listing 355 names**

The front of the memorial will feature outlines of Iraq and Afghanistan and service emblems. The back will list names of the 355 Floridians killed in each war.

PG Memorials will build the monument. The company has constructed veterans monuments across the nation such as the Fallen Warriors memorial in Philadelphia and the Key West Living Vietnam Memorial Wall.

The idea for an Afghanistan and Iraq war memorial came to Udovich, a retired Army infantry officer, when he moved to Florida from Delaware four years ago, he said.

"It was one of those things where it's sitting in a file, and you're looking at it week after week and eventually you just say, 'We got to get this done,'" Udovich said.

Cities such as Fort Pierce, Stuart, Freeport and Sebring were considered for the memorial, said Udovich, who has worked on the project with partners Kim Allison, a Gold Star mother; and Phil Wyllie, a retired Army Special Forces officer.

However, Port St. Lucie, unlike others, already had a central location that was home to multiple war memorials, making the new Iraq and Afghanistan memorial the perfect addition.

"Stuart and Fort Pierce, for example, both have beautiful veterans memorial parks with a few nice memorials, but if you go put in our monument in there, you're going to disturb their current presentation," Udovich said.

## **Strong local support for the project**

Support from the Port St. Lucie City Council and local veterans organizations, such as American Legion Post 318 and Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 566, also played a factor in Port St. Lucie's selection, he added.

"This memorial is very important to us, because we want to pass on the legacy to younger veterans," said Steven Cameron, membership director of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 566. "They will now be honored here, too, and we can look to them to take care of the memorials after we (Vietnam veterans) go on."

The local Vietnam Veterans of America chapter, which has about 100 members, has donated at least \$500 to the Afghanistan and Iraq memorial, Cameron said.

Udovich hopes the project acts as a catalyst for similar memorials to be built in other states, he said.

The foundation has raised about \$52,000 for the memorial, as of Monday, Udovich said; \$40,000 is still needed.

To donate, go to [www.IAWMF.org](http://www.IAWMF.org).