

Chico remembers U.S., Iraqi dead

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Chico State students and Chico residents covered Children's Park in a sea of white and red flags Monday to honor people who have died in the Iraq war.

Volunteers set up about 128,000 flags along the park's fence. Each of the 125,000 white flags represented five or six Iraqis who have died in the war. About 3,000 red flags represented each American soldier who has died in the war, said senior Owen Bettis, a program assistant for the Environmental Action and Resource Center and an event organizer.



Junior Amber Masters and Christina Aranguren, a 1991 alumna, place flags representing the casualties of the Iraq war at Children's Park on Monday. The red flags show American deaths.

The Iraq Body Count Memorial has traveled to different universities this year, including the University of Colorado, the University of Oregon and Portland State University, said Mark Stemen, adviser to EARC.

The main idea behind the memorial is to honor those who have died, not to protest the war, Bettis said.

"We just want to give people a visual about how many people are dying in the war," Bettis said.

Group members talked to the people who had organized the event at Portland State University and traveled to Ashland, Ore., to pick up the flags. The center has spent about \$1,000 on the memorial. The money was raised through donations from people in the community, Bettis said.

Ann Roach, 53, helped set up the flags. She hoped the memorial would get more people to think about the war, she said.

"The flags reminds us that the numbers are not just numbers and that these deaths mean

something to someone," she said.

Mothers and children are dying in the war, and people don't always remember that, she said. She hoped that those who walked by it would think about what the flags represent.

"If it just impacts a few people, it's worthwhile," Roach said.

Senior Nhu Huynh wanted to help because the war in Iraq reminds her of the Vietnam War, a war her father fought in, she said as she kneeled in a sea of red flags near Roach.

The memorial is a good way to show people what is going on in the world, she said.

"Families are torn apart in war," Huynh said. "It's just horrible. You have women and children dying, and then you have people living with that trauma for the rest of their lives."

Huynh has seen movies about the Vietnam War, and her father has told her stories about his experience, she said. Those images and stories have stayed with her.

Huynh skipped her 10 a.m. class to help EARC set up the flags because she hoped the memorial would impact those who walked by and help them realize that war is not good.

Mayor Andy Holcombe stopped by the display on his way to another event on campus. He said the display was a good visual for people who walk by.

"It's symbolic free speech at its best," Holcombe said. "It's persistent, eye-catching, and anything that gets the public aware about the cost of the war is good."

The members of the center spoke with city officials and were allowed to put the flags in the park, Bettis said.

"I hope people will stop to reflect on what this means and care," Roach said. "And maybe make a decision to change their own views on the war."

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