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Big tribute, small package

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November 07, 2009 2:47 AM

HOPE HODGE

Sometimes, fitting tributes can come in small packages.

Monday, a group of veterans and family members learned that their fight to get a stamp honoring the victims of the 1983 Beirut bombing is not over yet. Some members of the Beirut Stamp Initiative have been working for more than two decades to get approval for a stamp memorializing the 241 peacekeepers who perished in the attack, most of whom were based in Jacksonville.

In that time, they have written letters to three U.S. presidents, mailed petitions containing an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 signatures, and received three rejections from the U.S. Postal Service.

This year's application, the group's final effort, includes endorsements from Beirut Veterans of America, American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., 16 members of U.S. Congress and former commandant of the Marine Corps retired Gen. Michael W. Hagee.

The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, a group of 12 scholars and public figures whose members include former second lady Joan Mondale and Harvard academic Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., convened this weekend and were slated to deliver a decision about the Beirut memorial stamp.

But rather than denying the petition a fourth time, the committee chose to defer a decision until January, citing a lack of sufficient information about the memorial.

Bill Kibler, an Arlington, Va., resident and veteran who was in Beirut with the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit several months prior to the bombing, said he was pleased that the committee had not denied the group's request again.

"It's a really positive sign for now," he said.

A Web master for the Beirut Stamp Initiative, Kibler said he had worked to come up with a new idea this year to avoid another rejection. In the past, he said, the committee had denied requests based on its policy of not creating stamps to commemorate tragedies.

The latest application is for a stamp based on Jacksonville's

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Beirut Memorial, a wall bearing the names of those who died, guarded by a bronze statue of a "The Peacekeeper" standing sentinel. Since the USPS minted a stamp dedicated to the Vietnam Memorial in 2000, the group hopes that this approach will clear the way to approval for them.

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Judy Young of Burlington County, N.J., a Gold Star mother who lost her son, Sgt. Jeffrey Young, in the Beirut tragedy and co-founded the initiative about 24 years ago, said that finally getting a stamp would be a small but fitting tribute to the work and heroism of those like her son.

"It's not only kind of a victory for the Beirut families to be recognized, it's kind of a victory winning out over the post office committee," she said.

The victory would come after years of slights and indignation, as the group has watched characters like Bart Simpson receive tribute in a stamp while their requests are denied.

Kibler said a stamp would show that honoring the veterans of Beirut is as vital as paying tribute to those of better-known tragedies.

"It will finally mean a little more sense of closure, that the government's finally stepping up to acknowledge what happened 26 years ago," Kibler said.

But now the work of this group is over for a few months.

"All we can do now is sit and wait," Kibler said.

Officials with USPS stamp services did not immediately respond to requests for comment about the Beirut stamp.

Contact Hope Hodge at 910-219-8453 or at hhodge@freedomenc.com.

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POWERED BY PLUCK



[arrsea](#) wrote:

I agree with the sentiment of stamps 'honoring' cartoon characters but not people who served and died for our country. It is a shame we have stamps with snowmans, the Simpsons, Disney characters, Marvel Comics, and so many other 'things' but hesitate to honor the Beirut veterans.

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