

# VS vets hall moving closer to completion

By Nick Baptista, The Valley Springs News, Friday February 17, 2017

The new Jenny Lind Veterans Memorial District community hall in Valley Springs could be completed and open to the public by the end of May if not sooner.

Left on the checklist for completion is demolition of the old hall, paving a parking lot in its place, connecting a natural gas line and obtaining a certificate of occupancy from the Calaveras County Building Department.

One of the major obstacles toward completion, removal of the old hall, is set to be addressed at Tuesday's memorial district meeting when the board opens demolition bids.

A major stumbling block in completion of the hall has been PG&E prolonging the installation of electrical service to the building. PG&E dragged its feet because the veterans district, as a local government entity, buys its power through the Calaveras Public Power Agency, a government co-op. After several months of haggling whether it was PG&E's responsibility to provide the hookup, PG&E further delayed the installation saying it had not received payment when in fact the utility company had already cashed the veterans district's check.

District General Manager Frank Garza estimated PG&E delayed completion of the hall by about four months.

While waiting for the PG&E electrical hook-up about a dozen volunteers painted the interior of the building by stringing extension cords from the old hall to power up some spotlights.

The new 11,000-square-foot vets hall is nearly three times larger than the existing building. In addition to the commercial-grade kitchen, the hall will have multiple meeting rooms, larger stage area for theatrical events, along with a larger capacity for community and private events. The modern building also solves handicap-access, heating and air-conditioning issues associated with the 50-plus-year-old existing hall.

The district is planning a fundraiser for its first event, but has not solidified plans.

Garza was disappointed the hall was not completed in time for this year's Valley Springs Melodrama. "They could have sold a lot more tickets in the new hall," he said.

Construction of the shell back in 2010 cost nearly \$400,000, while interior work came in at \$837,000 and \$65,000 went toward utilities.

The district had enough funds in its account to pay for construction of the shell and received a \$400,000 loan from the Bank of Rio Vista to complete the interior work. The district gets approximately \$153,000 a year in funding from the county, a portion of which will be used to retire the loan, while fees from additional bookings, such as for weddings, use of the meeting hall and rooms will also be used to retire the loan.

In addition, Garza foresees a fee increase for use of the larger facility.

Back in 2007, there was a bond election to build a similar-sized hall. Measure C called for a \$20-a-year assessment on improved parcels within the Jenny Lind Veterans Memorial District for a period of no more than 10 years and it failed.