Woman seeks Korean War monument

By JOHN BENNETT
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WASHINGTON — From her tiny, one-room downtown office, Chayon Kim quietly campaigns for a $6 million memorial to honor those who gave their lives during the Korean War.

She began dreaming of a memorial to the Korean War dead long before the pilgrimage of Vietnam veterans arrived to dedicate their own monument last week.

With borrowed money and a dream she's nurtured since 1979, Korean-born Kim has caught the attention of Congress, war veterans and officials of the Vietnam War Memorial Commission.

Senate and House supporters rallied behind plans to build the memorial on federal land in Washington with public contributions — no tax dollars. People from all 21 countries that fought under the United Nations banner in Korea will be asked to contribute.

CONGRESSIONAL resolutions in both houses note the Korean War is the only major war in U.S. history with no national monument to honor those who died in battle.


Like the veterans of Vietnam, Pryor said, those from Korea came home and were forgotten.

More than 5 million American troops served in Korea. There were 54,246 killed and more than 100,000 wounded.

Even as the Vietnam War vets streamed out of town this week, the 40-year-old Kim was talking with Vietnam memorial officials about how to avoid the pitfalls they encountered in their drive for a monument.

"We don't want to do anything to infuriate the American people," she said, altogether aware of design controversies that almost spoiled the Vietnam memorial dream. "We want a simple, compelling, appropriate and visible monument."

Her volunteer assistant, Michael Panaytopoulos, a former Greek government press secretary at the United Nations, said everything is being done to minimize possible controversy.

KIM, a U.S. citizen for seven years, recalls huddling under shelter with relatives as American B-29 bombers blasted North Korean soldiers during the Korean War. Half of her relatives were killed by North Koreans, she said.

Sen. Howard Cannon, D-Nev., once stationed in South Korea, helped sponsor her immigration to the United States after the war, and she eventually studied anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

As a trade consultant in 1979, she said, she introduced Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, wife of the former Army general, to visiting Korean Veterans Association members in New York. It was then, she said, that she decided to promote the Korean War memorial.

With a $30,000 line of credit from a bank and only $1,250 in actual donations, Kim has lobbied Congress and veteran groups for the past year.

She's hoping the lame-duck Congress will go on record supporting a memorial to the Korean War so she can push plans to design and build the monument along Washington's Tidal Basin.

Kim has already lined up big-name support for the idea, including Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., President Reagan's closest friend on Capitol Hill. In Pittsburgh, Matthew Ridgway, former commanding general of the Eighth Army and the Army of the Republic of Korea, has given his support for an "appropriate" memorial.

Corporations with strong ties to the Defense Department — from Lockheed and Boeing to Martin Marietta and Grumman — are also being courted. And veterans groups, such as the American Legion, will be asked to chip in to the Korean monument.