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Movie Inspired Parade Organizer

Mother, Son Revive Veterans Day Event

November 09, 2000 | By CONSTANCE NEYER; Courant Staff Writer

In the spring of 1999, Marilda L. Gandara and her 25-year-old son, Paul Alfonso, were riveted to their seats as they watched the graphic carnage of "Saving Private Ryan."

They ate no popcorn, aghast at the horrible suffering depicted in the movie about D-Day in Normandy during World War II.

After leaving the theater, the mother and son, who was voted "Most Patriotic" in his Watkinson School Class of 1993, talked about the movie that starred Tom Hanks. It inspired them to do something for surviving veterans.

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"We talked about it together and came up with the idea of holding a large parade," she said.

Their talk resulted in the revival of the Veterans Day Parade in Hartford, which was discontinued in 1992 because of dwindling crowds. The annual celebration had evolved from the Armistice Day celebration recalling the end of World War I on Nov. 11, 1918.

The 2 1/2-hour parade, which will be held Saturday, is expected to include military hardware, flyovers and about 1,400 participants. Groups including VFW and American Legion posts and other veteran's groups, the governor's foot and horse guards and bands, Connecticut Army and Air National Guard units, the Tuskegee Airmen, police color guards and marching bands will take part.

The parade will begin at 9:30 a.m. at East River Drive Extension in East Hartford, will proceed over the Founders Bridge and march through downtown Hartford. A moment of silence will be observed at 11 a.m. Military exhibits will be displayed from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on the south side of the State Capitol.

"This will be the first time since 1992 that a regionwide Veterans Day Parade will take place, and we are long overdue in honoring the servicemen and women who made great sacrifices for our nation," said Gandara, parade grand marshal and president of the \$13.1 million Aetna Foundation in Hartford.

The 50-year-old Gandara enlisted the help of military brass from World War II and the Korean War, and military from the Vietnam and Gulf wars as well as veterans groups, businesses, corporations, civic organizations and municipalities to revive the parade.

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