

# 'Veterans Only' parking spaces popping up in South Florida

By **Johnny Diaz**

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On July 15, the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office designated a parking space for veterans outside its offices. The city of West Miami this week also approved a program to designate "Veterans Only" spaces at city-run parks and facilities. (Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office / Courtesy)

A South Florida city founded by World War II veterans wants to make it easier for fellow veterans to park.

The West Miami city commission passed an initiative Wednesday to designate "veterans only" parking spaces in the city, which is nestled between the Tamiami Trail and Coral Way.

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The reserved spaces will be available at city-run parks and facilities. At the commission meeting, commissioner Eric Diaz-Padron, who presented the initiative, held up a sign to show how the spots will be designated. The spaces will say "Veterans Only Parking" with seals of the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy.

"These spaces will not only be a showing of appreciation to our veterans, but also a functional benefit for those who fought in defense of our freedom," said Diaz-Padron. He said the city is looking at which spaces would get the special designation.

"I have requested that they be installed before Veterans Day, at least one will be unveiled on that day," he said. Veterans Day falls on Nov. 11.

How will his city's new designated parking program be enforced? The honor system.

"I have faith that people will respect our Veterans enough to not park in the space," said Diaz-Padron.

He noted that the parking program follows a 2016 resolution by Miami-Dade County vice chairwoman Rebeca Sosa that designated veteran spaces near elevators and entrances at county surface parking lots and garages managed by the county.

That program is aimed at serving the more than 60,000 veterans who live in Miami-Dade, according to U.S. Census figures. In 2017, the first space to get that special title was at the pool parking lot of A.D. Barnes Park off Bird Road in Miami. Broward county does not have designated parking spaces for vets, according to the county.

"While we remain forever indebted to our veterans, we must do all that we can to express our deep appreciation and admiration," Diaz-Padron added.

Veterans-only spaces have been popping up around South Florida. Earlier this year, Florida International University, based in Miami-Dade, added a space for veterans at the Veterans and Military affairs parking lot, according to FIU. The space is for veterans and active, reserve and National Guard soldiers at the main campus, according to [Panther.com](http://Panther.com). More spaces with signs that are marked in blue or gold and read "VETERAN PARKING," are expected on campus.

On July 15, the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office also set up a parking space for veterans in front of the sheriff's office. The sign at the space reads "Thank you for your service."

The sheriff's office said it wants to support veterans who come to the office for business. The Villages, an adult community in central Florida, also has such designated spaces for its residents. And last Veterans Day, Lowe's, the home improvement chain, began rolling out parking spaces for veterans as a way to say thank you for their service.

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