Four new Florida specialty license plates on tap, while two may see retirement

Richard Tribou, Orlando Sentinel

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For those keeping track at home, there's four more specialty license plates that could be on Florida's roads in the future, yet two others might be driving off into the sunset.

The Legislature passed CS/CS/SB 132, which now awaits the governor's signature. If signed, it will create tags for Fallen Law Enforcement Officers, Florida Sheriffs Association, Keiser University and Moffitt Cancer Center.

"We are pleased that the Legislature included Moffitt in the bill," said H. Lee Moffitt, founder of Moffitt Cancer Center, which is based in Tampa. "We hope this plate raises awareness for the center and the continued need for cancer research. If approved, revenue from the plate will go directly to funding research programs and expanding clinical trials at Moffitt. Our many grateful patients and supporters, along with our more than 4,000 employees, will have an opportunity to show their pride in our institution and support our research initiatives."
The same bill takes two plates currently with the less-than-required 1,000 sold plates and puts them into a presale probationary period. Those two plates are the Hispanic Achievers and St. Johns River tags.

The law actually gives these two plates a lifeline beyond what current Florida law requires. Any specialty tag that averages less than 1,000 sold plates in the previous 12 months is to be removed from production. Both plates now get a lifeline in which current plates on the road can be renewed while each plate's sponsor organization will now attempt to drum up enough preorder commitments to reach the 1,000-plate threshold.

That same threshold is required for the four new specialty tags before the state will produce any actual license plates for sale. There's a two-year limit from the point the plate's bill becomes law for each group to gather the requisite preorders. If any tag approved in this year's bill cannot generate enough preorders before June 30, 2016, then the plate won't be produced at all. The same demise is faced by the Hispanic Achievers and St. Johns River plates.

Seven specialty plates have been retired under this 1,000-plate threshold in the past including those for Arena Football League teams Orlando Predators and Tampa Bay Storm as well as a plate that raised money for the Girl Scouts of America.

Of the four specialty tags approved in 2013, only two have made it into production after having satisfied the 1,000-tag commitment, while the others are still collecting preorders. The plates you can actually see on the highways are for the Florida Masons and Lauren's Kids, which raises money to fight child sexual abuse. The other two plates approved in 2013, for the American Legion and Big Brothers and Big Sisters are still working on the 1,000 requirement.

As far as the four new plates, each will generate $25 for its respective nonprofit organization.

The Fallen Law Enforcement Officers plate has been an effort that was spearheaded by students at the Pinellas Park High School Criminal Justice Academy in the wake of a tragic event in which three St. Petersburg police officers were shot and killed in 2011. The plate is titled "A Hero Remembered Never Dies" and supports Police and Kids Foundation, Inc.

"We're extremely excited and thankful about finally getting the plate sponsored and passed," said Tracey Schofield, a current Brooksville Police Department detective and president of Police and Kids Foundation. "We have worked so hard and we couldn't be prouder. The charity is here to help and this will go a long way in helping us."
As far as getting the 1,000 pre-ordered plates, Schoefield says the group is hoping for the best.

"There are a few other law-enforcement plates, but none that look like ours or do what we are hoping to achieve. We have a few large organizations we'll contact in an attempt to get the word out and hope for the best. I'm confident we'll reach this number and more."

One of those other law-enforcement plates competing for Florida drivers' attention will be the new one for the Florida Sheriff's Association, and currently on the roads are plates for Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch, Fraternal Order of Police, Police Athletic League and the Police Benevolent Association.

Then there's the plate for Keiser University, which would become the state's 37th college and university specialty plate, but a spokesperson for the school feels the 1,000 threshold won't be a problem.

"We have 20,000 students and 3,500 employees," said Belinda Keiser, Vice chancellor of Community Relations and Student Advancement. "There's a lot of enthusiasm over here about this. And we have over 50,000 alum because we've been around for 40 years so we think we'll easily meet that goal."

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