

Army museum at Belvoir eyes 2015 opening

Dog tags, iPad may give visitors unique experience

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The National Museum of the United States Army is scheduled to open June 14, 2015, the Army's 240th birthday.

The museum is "long overdue," said retired Gen. Gordon Sullivan, president of the Association of the U.S. Army, at a May 16 event in Washington, D.C., to honor the museum's supporters.

"It's been 236 years in the making and it's about time," said Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, a World War II veteran and Medal of Honor recipient who was keynote speaker at the event.

The wait has gotten a little longer. The opening date has been pushed back two years from previous estimates that the museum would open in 2013. Groundbreaking for the \$300 million project at Fort Belvoir, Va., could come in spring 2012, a year later than earlier estimates.

That is because the site of the planned museum has changed twice since the 2005 base realignment and closure plan put more demands on space at Fort Belvoir, said retired Col. David Fabian, communications director of the Army Historical Foundation, which is raising funds for the museum under a charter from Congress.

The museum is now planned for a 41-acre site on the north side of the post adjacent to Fairfax County Parkway. Organizers are waiting for an environmental impact statement to be approved, probably within the month, Fabian said May 18.

The Army, the oldest branch of the military, is the only one with-

out a national museum, officials said. More than 40 regional, certified Army museums are open at installations around the country, but there is no overall museum for the service and its soldiers.

"It's worth our effort to have a museum to tell the story," Inouye said. "I'm going to do all I can to make certain this museum becomes a reality."

So far, \$59.5 million has been raised for construction of the museum, Fabian said. About \$155 million is needed to build it and open to the public.

Last year was the best so far for fundraising, with \$25 million coming in, said retired Gen.

William W. Hartzog, president of the foundation. Among the top donors, Lockheed Martin gave \$11 million for the education pavilion and Boeing donated \$5 million for the Soldiers' Stories Gallery.

The goal for the building project is \$200 million, including outdoor areas such as a parade field and memorial garden. The remaining \$100 million of the estimated cost will come from the Army for planning, design and exhibits. The Army donated the 41-acre site.

"We still have a ways to go, so we'll continue to work hard to bring this project to fruition," Hartzog said.

Planners envision a state-of-the-art sensory experience at the museum. They brought in someone who has done projects for Universal Studios, LEGO theme parks and the International Spy Museum, among others.

"Jeb Bennett [the museum director] said 'I'm counting on you

to do something special,'" said Brian Edwards, president of Edwards Technologies Inc. He is bringing multimedia technologies onboard to give visitors a personalized tour.

One plan in the works is to hand visitors an iPad and a specially designed dog tag when they arrive. The dog tag will be "the key to your customized experience," Edwards said at the May 16 event. Visitors will answer questions on the iPad to give a sense of their own interests, such as geography, science or strategy. When they are done, the iPad will scan the dog tag to register them in the system and customize their own visit.

"We try to define a category you fit into so when you go through the museum, you see information that's more relevant to your visit," Edwards said. "We can skew what the museum will give you back. It's possible we can all go through the museum and have various experiences based on our likes." □

PUBLIC SPACES

The 185,000-square-foot museum is expected to draw about 750,000 visitors a year. A small sample of what they might see:

Education Pavilion \$11 million

Interactive space with motion-sensitive "smart tables," computers, kiosks.

Army Theater \$10 million

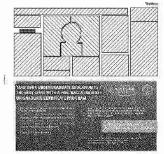
A huge 360-degree projection display will surround visitors with visuals and sound.

Army Concourse \$10 million

The 300-foot-long, glass-walled concourse features a timeline of key moments and people.

Soldiers' Stories Gallery \$5 million

Free-standing pylons will display individual soldiers' faces, bio information and narrative.





Army Commemorative Coins are on sale to raise funds for the museum. This silver \$1 coin is one of three types offered. For information, see www.armyhistory.org.